



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



THURSDAY – 28 JUL 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	07/27 CBO: fertility rates down, deaths rates up
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/27/pandemic-cut-deep-americas-demographics-lower-birt/
GIST	The coronavirus pandemic has done a doozy on the country's demographics, with fertility rates plummeting and death rates higher than expected for years to come, the Congressional Budget Office said Wednesday.

Analysts are now figuring an additional 140,000 deaths per year, or about 4.5% extra, for the rest of this decade.

The fertility rate, meanwhile, has dropped to 1.6 births per woman. Even when it begins to rise again, it will plateau at 1.75 births — well below the 1.9 births CBO figured on before the pandemic, and far less than the 2.1-birth “replacement rate” needed to maintain the population.

By 2043, immigration will account for all net population growth, CBO said.

It all means a much smaller country than CBO was projecting several years ago. In 2019, just before the pandemic, CBO figured the total population 30 years out would reach 388 million. Now, CBO puts the estimate for 2052 at 369 million people.

Those projections were part of an overall grim warning about the trajectory of the federal budget, with Uncle Sam poised to shovel out an increasingly large amount of cash just to pay off the debts Congress has already incurred.

The annual deficit — the difference between taxes collected and money spent — will nearly triple over the next 30 years.

Total debt — the accumulation of those deficits — will “far exceed” all previous U.S. records, and still be heading deeper into the red, CBO said.

“Such high and rising debt could have significant economic and financial consequences,” the analysts said in one of their more stark warnings. “It could, among other things, slow economic growth, drive up interest payments to foreign holders of U.S. debt, elevate the risk of a fiscal crisis, increase the likelihood of less abrupt adverse effects, make the U.S. fiscal position more vulnerable to an increase in interest rates and cause lawmakers to feel more constrained in their policy choices.”

That warning comes despite some short-term good news.

The deficit this year will drop below 4% of GDP, as a surge in revenue begins to eat into the massive spending spree Congress has been on during the pandemic. Revenue this year comes to 19.6% of GDP, while spending is 23.5%.

Over the next decade, things will remain about the same with spending slimming to 23.2% of GDP and revenue tumbling to 18.1% — still higher than the average of recent decades, but nowhere near enough to cover Washington’s spending.

By the middle of the century, revenue will tick back up to nearly 19% of GDP, but spending will be approaching 30% of GDP, leaving a massive hole in the budget.

Interest payments on the debt grow the most, going from 1.6% of GDP now to more than 6% in the middle of the century.

Also driving spending is the expansion of Uncle Sam’s major health programs, followed by rising Social Security payments. Those are all fueled by the changing demographics, with the aging population putting more burden on a slimmer pool of workers.

The lower projected fertility rate is a dominant factor, accelerating trends.

For example, the fertility rates of women over 30 and under 30 had been converging. But during the pandemic, for the first time, the older crowd had a higher rate than the younger one. As recently as 1980, the under-30s had a fertility rate three times that of the over-30s.

	<p>CBO figures life expectancy will slip in the coming decade, falling from 79.3 years to 78.6 years. And those who make it to age 65 are now projected to live another 19.2 years, down from 19.9 years in the 2021 projection.</p> <p>By the middle of the century, things will have improved, with life expectancy ticking back up to 81.8 years, and those who make it to 65 projected to live another 21.4 years.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/28 Day 155 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/28/russia-ukraine-war-latest-what-we-know-on-day-155-of-the-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian forces are undertaking a “massive redeployment” of troops to three southern regions of Ukraine in what appears to be a change of tactics by Moscow, a senior adviser to President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Wednesday. Oleksiy Arestovych said Russia was sending troops to the Melitopol and Zaporizhzhia regions and Kherson, signalling a change in tactics to strategic defence from offence. • Russian forces have reportedly taken over Ukraine’s second biggest power plant in eastern Ukraine, an adviser to President Zelenskiy said on Wednesday, after an earlier claim by Russian-backed forces to have captured it intact. “They achieved a tiny tactical advantage - they captured Vuhlehirsk,” Oleksiy Arestovych said. Unverified footage posted on social media appeared to show fighters from Russia’s Wagner private military company posing in front of the plant. • Ukraine confirms its strategy to isolate Russian forces after a strike on the key Russian-held Antonivskiy Bridge into the occupied southern city of Kherson and said the operation to liberate Kherson “has already begun”. Presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said there is a “certain plan” of the armed forces of Ukraine to “isolate [Russia’s] military operations”. “No matter how much the enemy overtakes forces and resources on the western bank of the Dnieper, the Armed Forces of Ukraine will first leave them without ammunition depots, fuel, communications and command, and then they will clean up the remnants of their forces,” he said adding that Russian forces had three options: “retreat (if possible), surrender or be destroyed.” Another adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, added: “Occupiers should learn how to swim across the Dnipro River. Or should leave Kherson while it is still possible. There may not be a third warning.” • Zelenskiy said Ukraine would rebuild the Antonivskiy Bridge and other crossings in the region after Ukrainian forces struck the strategic Russian supply route in southern Ukraine’s Kherson region. “We are doing everything to ensure that the occupying forces do not have any logistical opportunities in our country,” he added. Ukraine confirms strategy to isolate Russian forces: • Preparations are continuing for the first ships to leave Ukrainian ports as Turkey unveiled a centre in Istanbul to oversee the process. Ukraine’s navy also confirmed that work has started at three Ukrainian Black Sea ports to prepare for renewed grain exports. The first shipment is expected to depart within days, Turkish defence minister, Hulusi Akar, said. • US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said he will speak with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov by phone - the first between the two diplomats since before the start of the war. The call would not be “a negotiation about Ukraine,” he added. • Russia delivered less gas to Europe on Wednesday as physical flows via Nord Stream 1 tumbled to 14.4m kilowatt hours an hour (kWh/h) between noon and 1pm GMT from around 28m kWh/h a day earlier, already just 40% of normal capacity. Germany accused Moscow of engaging in “power play” over energy exports after network data from the gas transfer station in Lubmin, north-east Germany, showed only about 17m kilowatt hours of gas arrived between 8am and 9am, compared with more than 27m kWh between 6am and 7am. • The west risks the initiation of nuclear conflict with China or Russia because of a “breakdown of communication” with the two countries, the UK’s national security adviser has warned. Sir Stephen Lovegrove, 55, said that the erosion of backdoor channels had resulted in an increased chance of an accidental escalation into war. • Ukraine has approved the appointment of a new prosecutor general, Andriy Kostin. “The person is decent, professional, he knows how to work systematically,” Zelenskiy said.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Biden administration has offered a deal to Russia aimed at bringing home WNBA star Brittney Griner and another jailed American, ex-US marine Paul Whelan, the secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said on Wednesday.
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HEADLINE	07/28 Russia fires missiles from Belarus
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/28/russian-forces-fire-barrage-missiles-northern-ukraine-from-belarus
GIST	<p>A barrage of 25 missiles has been fired by Russian forces at northern regions of Ukraine from neighbouring Belarus as the Ukrainian southern offensive appears to be gathering pace.</p> <p>The early morning wave of missile strikes launched from the territory of Russia's key ally hit targets in the Chernihiv region, including an apartment block, as well as locations outside Kyiv and around the city of Zhytomyr, according to Ukrainian officials and Belarusian opposition figures.</p> <p>The Chernihiv regional governor, Viacheslav Chaus, said nine missiles had struck close to the village of Honcharivska with some falling in the forest nearby.</p> <p>The strikes came as Ukraine celebrated Statehood Day for the first time. In a national message, the president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said: "Restless morning. Again – missile terror. We will not give up. We will not give up. Do not intimidate us. Ukraine is an independent, free, indivisible state. And it will always be like that."</p> <p>Activists who track Russian military moves in Belarus said the missile launches came from Ziabrouka airfield near Gomel, prompting calls for increased sanctions against Belarus.</p> <p>The Belarusian opposition leader, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, condemned the latest escalation from Belarus.</p> <p>"Horried to see how Russia continues to use Belarus to attack Ukraine," she tweeted. "At least 25 missiles were launched from Belarus targeting Kyiv, Chernihiv & other cities this morning. Lukashenka can't fool anyone. He is guilty of crimes against Belarusians & Ukrainians & must be held accountable."</p> <p>British defence and intelligence officials said on Thursday a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the country's south had virtually cut off the Russian-occupied southern city of Kherson and left thousands of Russian troops stationed near the Dnieper River "highly vulnerable".</p> <p>Ukraine has made clear it intends to recapture Kherson, which fell to Russia in the early days of the invasion, launched by the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, on 24 February.</p> <p>"Russia's 49th Army, stationed on the west bank of the [Dnieper] River, now looks highly vulnerable," it said in a regular intelligence bulletin. "Its loss would severely undermine Russia's attempts to paint the occupation as a success."</p> <p>Witness accounts from Russian-occupied southern areas of Ukraine suggest Moscow has been trying to move columns of equipment to reinforce its troops there, as well as noting a marked increase in Russian military flights.</p> <p>However, stretched between its attempts to continue its struggling offensive in Donbas and defend the south, Russia appears to be deploying ill-trained troops and in some cases vehicles with homemade armour.</p> <p>Underlining the vulnerability of Russian forces in and around Kherson, images emerged on social media of a ferry being operated on the Dnieper to replace the damaged Antonivskiy Bridge – one of the main routes into the city – which was badly damaged by a Ukrainian missile strike early on Wednesday.</p>

	<p>Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defence Council, earlier tweeted that Russia was concentrating “the maximum number of troops” in the direction of the Kherson but gave no details.</p> <p>Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Zelenskiy, said Russia was conducting a “massive redeployment” of forces from the east to the south in what amounted to a strategic shift from attack to defence.</p> <p>Sign up to First Edition, our free daily newsletter – every weekday morning at 7am BST</p> <p>Zelenskiy said Ukraine would rebuild the Antonivskiy Bridge and other crossings in the region.</p> <p>“We are doing everything to ensure that the occupying forces do not have any logistical opportunities in our country,” he said in his Wednesday evening address.</p> <p>Russian officials had earlier said they would turn instead to pontoon bridges and ferries to get forces across the river.</p> <p>Russian-backed forces on Wednesday said they had captured the Soviet-era coal-fired Vuhlehirsk power plant, Ukraine’s second-largest, in what was Moscow’s first significant gain in more than three weeks.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/28 Russia takes over Ukraine power plant
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/28/russian-forces-capture-vuhlehirska-ukraine-second-biggest-power-station-donetsk
GIST	<p>Russian forces have taken over Ukraine’s second-biggest power plant and are conducting a “massive redeployment” of troops to three southern regions, a Ukrainian presidential adviser has said, amid expectations of a Ukrainian counter-offensive.</p> <p>Russian-backed forces said on Wednesday they had captured intact the Soviet-era coal-fired Vuhlehirska power plant, in what is Moscow’s first significant gain in more than three weeks.</p> <p>Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskiy, confirmed the capture of the plant in the eastern Donetsk region, but said it was only a “tiny tactical advantage” for Russia.</p> <p>The Russian redeployment to the south appeared to be a switch from offence to strategic defence, he added, with troops sent to the Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions.</p> <p>Ukraine has made clear it intends to recapture the southern city of Kherson, which fell to Russia in the early days of the war.</p> <p>Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine’s national security and defence council, earlier tweeted that Russia was concentrating “the maximum number of troops” in the direction of Kherson but gave no details.</p> <p>Arestovych also said Ukraine’s operation to liberate Kherson “has already begun” after striking the Antonivskiy Bridge – a key Russian supply route into the Russian-occupied southern city on Wednesday.</p> <p>In a Wednesday evening address, Zelenskiy said: “We are doing everything to ensure that the occupying forces do not have any logistical opportunities in our country”, and promised to rebuild the Antonivskiy Bridge and other crossings in the region.</p> <p>Russian officials earlier said they would turn instead to pontoon bridges and ferries to get forces across the river.</p>

Arestovych also confirmed Ukraine's strategy to isolate Russian forces, saying in an interview with Ukrainian television on Wednesday night that there was a "certain plan" of the armed forces of Ukraine to "isolate [Russia's] military operations".

"No matter how much the enemy overtakes forces and resources on the western bank of the Dnieper, the Armed Forces of Ukraine will first leave them without ammunition depots, fuel, communications and command, and then they will clean up the remnants of their forces," he said, adding that Russian forces had three options: "Retreat (if possible), surrender or be destroyed."

Another senior presidential adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, added: "Occupiers should learn how to swim across the Dnieper river. Or should leave Kherson while it is still possible. There may not be a third warning."

Ukrainian forces in the south said they had killed 66 enemy troops and destroyed three tanks and two arms dumps in the past 24 hours. Russian forces attacked the city of Mykolaiv with multiple rocket launchers, they added. Reuters was unable to verify the battlefield reports.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, said he planned a phone conversation with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov – the first between the two diplomats since before the start of the war.

The call in the coming days would not be "a negotiation about Ukraine", Blinken said at a news conference, restating Washington's position that any talks on ending the war must be between Kyiv and Moscow.

Aside from discussing Americans detained by Russia, Blinken said he would raise with Lavrov the tentative deal on grain exports reached last week between Russia, the US, Turkey and Ukraine.

Russia has received no formal request from Washington about a phone call between Blinken and Lavrov, Tass news agency reported.

The US has made "a substantial offer" to Russia for it to release two US citizens, WNBA star Brittney Griner and former US Marine Paul Whelan, Blinken said, without giving details of what the US was offering in return.

Blinken said he would press Lavrov to respond to the offer.

A source familiar with the situation confirmed a CNN report that Washington was willing to exchange Russian arms trafficker Viktor Bout, who is serving a 25-year prison sentence in the US, as part of a deal.

The last publicly recognised contact between Blinken and Lavrov was 22 February, when Blinken wrote to Lavrov to cancel a meeting they had planned as a last-ditch effort to avert the Russian invasion, saying Moscow had shown no interest in serious diplomacy on the matter.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Boise booming housing market cools
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/boise-housing-market-cooling-down-zoomtowns-11658931254?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>BOISE, Idaho—During the pandemic-fueled housing boom, Boise emerged as one of America's hottest "Zoomtowns," communities that experienced a spike in population from an influx of remote workers.</p> <p>Now, the housing boom around Idaho's capital city has ground to a halt. Buyers are balking at record prices and mortgage rates that last month hit a 13-year high. Sixty-one percent of listings in the Boise metro area had a price cut in June, the highest rate out of 97 metro areas surveyed, according to</p>

brokerage [Redfin](#) Corp. Home builders who [couldn't keep up with demand last year](#) are cutting back on construction.

The factors that made the Boise area so alluring, such as its relative affordability and its fewer pandemic restrictions, are less appealing now that prices have climbed and companies are calling workers back to their offices.

When average mortgage rates surged above 5% in April, “it was like somebody just turned the lights off,” said Shauna Pendleton, a Boise real-estate agent for Redfin. “The buyers just disappeared off the face of the earth.”

The slowdown in Boise mirrors what’s happening in housing markets around the U.S. After two years of unrelenting demand that [unleashed the biggest housing boom in 15 years](#), sales activity is cooling and more homes are sitting on the market.

Sales of existing U.S. homes have declined for five straight months. Consumers are nervous that mortgage rates will keep rising, and buyer budgets are crimped by inflation and stock-market declines. [Federal Reserve officials agreed Wednesday](#) to raise interest rates for the fourth time this year.

Some of the metro areas that [attracted out-of-state buyers](#) early in the housing boom are cooling off the fastest. The metro areas with the most price cuts in June after Boise were Denver, Salt Lake City and Tacoma, Wash., Redfin said.

The supply of homes for sale is climbing nationally, though it remains below prepandemic levels. The inventory of existing single-family homes for sale in Ada County, which includes Boise, surged 179% in June from a year earlier, according to Boise Regional Realtors. In the Austin, Texas, area, active listings rose 218% year-over-year in June, while Phoenix-area active inventory climbed 156%, according to local real estate groups.

“Too many buyers cannot afford housing in this market,” said Nancy Vanden Houten, lead U.S. economist at Oxford Economics, which ranked Boise as the least affordable U.S. housing market in the first quarter. “Some markets have become much more overheated than others, and I don’t think we can rule out price declines in some of those areas.”

On a national basis, Ms. Vanden Houten expects a slowdown in price growth rather than price declines. Some small, affordable markets [continued to attract home buyers](#) in recent months, according to The Wall Street Journal/Realtor.com Emerging Housing Markets Index.

Boise was the most overvalued housing market in the U.S. in June, according to an analysis of 100 markets by researchers at Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University. Boise-area home values were 69% above what they should be relative to Boise’s long-term pricing trend, the analysis said.

Gabriel and Briana O’Reilly, who were eager to buy a Boise home only months ago, have put their search on hold. The couple, who live in Dayton, Ohio, made three unsuccessful bids for homes in Boise earlier this year. By early May, with prices still steep and borrowing rates rising fast, they decided to take a break. They plan to move to Boise in August so Mr. O’Reilly can start a new job, and they expect to start looking again six to 12 months after that.

“We think the market’s going to be dropping continuously for a while here,” said Mr. O’Reilly, who is 29 and works as a civil engineer.

Price growth is already slowing in the Boise area but remains robust. The median existing-home sales price in Ada County rose 11.5% in June from a year earlier, compared with 48.9% year-over-year growth in May 2021, according to Boise Regional Realtors.

Market watchers expect Boise-area sale prices to drop at least 10% from their peak. Home builders, who built larger luxury homes as prices soared, plan to scale back to smaller designs.

“It did go way too far,” said Corey Barton, president of CBH Homes, the region’s biggest home builder. “It’s slowly going back to the old Boise.”

[Boise’s regional population was growing before the pandemic](#). After stagnating for years following the 2007-09 recession, home prices started to climb in 2016 as people in nearby states realized how much more cheaply they could live in Boise. That in-migration was turbocharged in the past two years by remote work and pandemic-related restrictions in other states.

Brighton Corp., a builder based in nearby Meridian, shut its sales offices for about eight weeks when the pandemic hit, said David Turnbull, the company’s owner. “When we opened them back up, we were just swamped,” he said. “Anything you listed for sale sold within days. You had bidding wars. Boise had never seen that. I mean, this is California stuff.”

The buying frenzy sent the median sales price for existing single-family homes in Ada County soaring to a peak of \$586,750 in May—up 79% from three years earlier, and 44% higher than the equivalent national figure. Idaho posted the strongest home-price growth of any state last year, according to mortgage-finance company [Freddie Mac](#).

Ada County and neighboring Canyon County grew 7.8% between 2020 and 2022 to about 782,000 residents, according to estimates from the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho. Three Boise suburbs—Meridian, Caldwell and Nampa—ranked among the 15 fastest-growing large U.S. cities in the year ended July 2021, according to the Census Bureau.

Clay Carley, a real-estate developer and fifth-generation Boisean, recalled that Boise used to be so quiet that residents wore T-shirts in the 1980s featuring a black rectangle labeled “Boise at Night.” Now locals complain about the congestion and lack of parking.

“It used to be a secret that no one knew about, but now everyone knows,” said Laura McGeorge, a physician in Boise. It’s harder to get into a restaurant, she said, and she no longer sees familiar faces on the street downtown. She also worries about how much housing prices have accelerated beyond local wages.

“My daughter is going to be a teacher and always wanted to come back here, and I don’t think she’s going to be able to afford it,” she said.

About 26% of new and existing homes sold in the Boise metro area were affordable to households making the area’s median family income of \$87,500 in the first quarter, according to the National Association of Home Builders. That is down from 80% of homes sold in the first quarter of 2012. The estimate assumes a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage and a 10% down payment.

The decline in affordability and general economic uncertainty has pushed many buyers to the sidelines, real-estate agents say. At the same time, sellers are listing their homes to take advantage of the high prices before it’s too late.

Some of the people who moved to Boise in recent years are now moving back because they need to return to in-person work, want to be closer to family or didn’t like the outdoorsy lifestyle as much as they expected, said real-estate agent Sheila Smith. Some longtime residents who don’t like how much Boise has grown are moving to more-affordable locales. And investors are cashing out.

“It’s the reversal of the Covid effect,” Ms. Smith said.

Ms. McGeorge and her husband, Frank Mynar, put their Boise house on the market at the beginning of June. A few buyers toured the house but none made an offer. Nearby houses also went up for sale. The

couple, who are hoping to downsize to a smaller place in the area, cut the price to \$1.58 million from \$1.68 million.

“I feel like I have to hunker down and just be patient,” Ms. McGeorge said. “Selfishly as a seller, I want to sell my house, but I think it’s good for the community to have some correction here.”

Boise-area home builders are starting construction on fewer homes compared with a year ago, and some are cutting prices and offering incentives to attract buyers, said Eric Allen, senior vice president for advisory at housing-market research firm Zonda.

CBH Homes’s average selling price was about \$500,000 last year, up from about \$350,000 before the pandemic. Mr. Barton said he expects to return to prepandemic pricing to better match local incomes.

“We’ve somewhat run out of the people that were really serious about moving” due to the pandemic, he said. “We’re going to have to safely be back in the \$300,000s.”

Many Boise residents, including real-estate agents, welcome the slowdown. About 82% of residents of the greater Boise region, known as the Treasure Valley, said the area was growing too fast in a November survey by Boise State University, up from about 45% in 2016. People who had lived in Idaho for more than a decade were more likely to say the Treasure Valley was growing too fast.

Boise employers have trouble recruiting workers because they can’t afford housing, said Samia Islam, an economics professor at Boise State. Some homeowners have seen their property taxes climb alongside home values. Some feel stuck in their homes, worried that if they sell they will be unable to afford an equivalent home at current prices.

“For the stability of the local economy, I feel that some correction is not necessarily going to be a bad thing,” Ms. Islam said. “In fact, I feel that it’s absolutely needed.”

Tanya Savage, who is 44 and is self employed, started shopping for her first home in February with a \$400,000 budget. She had spent years saving money and improving her credit score, and she was tired of her landlord raising the rent.

Ms. Savage didn’t have a lot of cash to compete in bidding wars. But by May, the market had calmed enough that the seller of a two-bedroom house near the Boise River Greenbelt accepted Ms. Savage’s offer at the \$395,000 asking price and agreed to pay \$10,000 toward her closing costs.

Still, Ms. Savage’s mortgage rate climbed from 3% when she started shopping to more than 5% by the time the purchase closed in June, pushing her monthly payments higher than expected.

“I feel like I did buy at the peak of the market here in Boise, so there were less people out there hunting because of that,” she said. “But I had to pay more than I really wanted.”

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HEADLINE	07/27 US, Europe long economic standoff Russia
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-europe-dig-in-forlong-economicstandoff-with-russia-11658919600?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Western governments are bracing for a protracted economic confrontation with Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, as Moscow fights back against international sanctions by disrupting energy and food supplies.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Russia cut natural gas flows on the crucial Nord Stream pipeline to Germany to 20% of capacity, down from 40%, stoking fears that Western Europe might not be able to stockpile the gas it will need to get through the winter. Natural-gas prices in Europe in early trading rose more than 8% to about 220 euros, equivalent to \$223, a megawatt-hour in response to the move.</p>

Over the weekend, Russian missiles [hit port facilities in Odessa](#), a day after Moscow [agreed to allow safe passage](#) of grain from the Ukrainian port. The attack raised fresh doubts that the deal would help get Ukraine's prodigious harvest to the world and help to ease surging food prices.

The twin moves demonstrated Moscow's [willingness to choke supplies of essential goods](#) in an effort [to hit back at the West](#) as it tries to punish Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) for a war that has killed thousands of people and [displaced millions](#).

Western officials, however, argue that time is on their side.

Russia's squeeze on energy and food shipments is causing immediate pain—in the West and elsewhere. But as European countries work to make themselves less reliant on Russian supplies, that impact will wane, Western officials say.

The toll exacted by Western sanctions on a now-isolated Russia, however, will climb as the months pass, they say, and as Russia's industrial base erodes.

The allies say they are united in a commitment to stick to their sanctions.

"We have seen 27 very different European governments adopt very ambitious sets of sanctions," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told The Wall Street Journal. "There may be lively discussions around individual measures, but everyone agrees on the overall direction."

Energy [has proved to be an especially sensitive issue](#), at times splitting the European Union and creating differences between Brussels and Washington. Hungary [delayed the EU's Russia oil ban](#), while Spain and Portugal have opposed EU calls to conserve gas. Washington, meanwhile, [has cautioned the EU](#) over an outright oil ban and is trying to fashion instead a Russia oil price cap that would lessen the sting for the rest of the world.

If Mr. Putin cuts off more gas, economists say the pain for Europe would be significant and likely trigger a recession. Already high energy and food prices, aggravated by the invasion and sanctions, have contributed to record inflation on both sides of the Atlantic.

Western officials, however, think Russia's energy moves ultimately will backfire, ending any debate in Europe over whether Moscow can ever be a reliable energy supplier for the future. Europe is thus speeding its transition from Russian oil and gas, which will eventually deprive Moscow of its biggest, long-term customer.

Meanwhile, Russia faces its own deep recession this year and is struggling to import vital technologies and machinery, officials say. They predict a slow bleed that will degrade Russia's economy over time and say Russian consumers already have been cut off from Western goods and services.

"If Europe sticks with it, and they don't give up, in the long-run, Russia's economic position is quite dire," said Gerard DiPippo, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Last week, Europe approved a fresh package of sanctions on Russia, banning gold imports and widening the list of banned exports. They [backed off placing limited sanctions](#) on Russian metals company VSMPO-Avisma PJSC for fear Moscow would retaliate by cutting titanium exports to the EU's aviation industry.

With eurozone inflation at record highs and growth forecasts falling, senior European officials say the appetite for big new sanctions to further limit Russian exports—which could be expected to drive up global prices for some commodities—has waned for now.

Instead, they and counterparts in the U.S. are looking to make existing sanctions more effective. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz warned Russia last week that no sanctions will be lifted if it tries to impose terms of a peace deal on Ukraine.

U.S. officials said there had been no discussions within the Biden administration about relaxing penalties on Russia because of domestic economic pressures. U.S. officials say sanctions have damaged Russia's military, particularly its ability to maintain or build new tanks and guided missiles.

They also say sanctions will increasingly hurt the Russian economy. The ruble has rallied after slumping early in the war, and Russia's central bank has dropped interest rates to pre-war levels. Both developments have been used by Moscow to project an image of resilience in face of the sanctions.

However, the ruble's strength comes in part thanks to capital controls imposed to prevent people and financial institutions in Russia from moving financial assets out of the country. "There is no outlet for people who want to get money out of Russia," said a U.S. Treasury official.

Russia is also getting cut off from foreign goods that increasingly will be missed by everyday Russians, officials say. U.S. exports, at \$77.4 million in June, are down 87% from a year earlier and the lowest for any individual month since 1992.

Global exports of semiconductors to Russia have fallen 90% since sanctions were imposed, U.S. officials said last month. Clay Lowery, who leads research at the Institute for International Finance, a trade association, estimates Russia's economy will contract by 5% to 10% this year.

That is less than earlier IIF estimates but still "a terrible year for an economy," he said.

Russian officials [have dialed back their own estimates](#) of this year's likely contraction to between 4% and 6%, having forecast in April a decline of between 8% and 10%. But they say the contraction will extend into next year, when gross domestic product could fall by as much as 4%.

"The economic decline will be more extended over time," Russia's central bank governor, Elvira Nabiullina, told reporters after lowering rates last week.

Russia came into the war with robust reserves and low foreign debt. It still has roughly \$300 billion in deployable reserves, despite the freezing abroad of Western-denominated central bank assets. Russia's National Wealth Fund, which receives oil and gas revenues, has around \$200 billion in assets, half of which are in non-Western currencies, Mr. DiPippo said.

EU countries still pay Russia roughly \$1 billion daily for energy imports, maintaining the Kremlin's cushion of foreign reserves, although that will change once the oil embargo kicks in late this year.

The U.S. and its allies also have fresh sanctions options available, said Jacob Neil, [Morgan Stanley](#)'s former chief Russian economist and a member of the International Working Group on Russian Sanctions, an independent group tackling additional sanctions proposals.

Measures could include powerful steps used in the past against Iran and others, such as forcing Russian international energy revenues into overseas escrow accounts backed by the threat of sanctions against foreign firms that don't comply.

Daniel Glazer, a former U.S. Treasury official, said the West could also move to push more Russian banks off the global Swift bank-transaction network.

"The sanctions have been unprecedented in speed and scale, but they are not yet comprehensive," said Edward Fishman at Columbia University's Center for Global Energy Policy, who helped design sanctions against Russia after it annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in 2014. "Addressing all of those gaps in the sanctions regime would greatly increase pressure on Russia's economy."

HEADLINE	07/28 Forgotten? Teacher sits in Russia prison
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/07/28/marc-fogel-teacher-russia-prison/
GIST	<p>OAKMONT, Pa. — The “other American” imprisoned in Russia has a name, too.</p> <p>He was always just Mr. Fogel to the students he entranced with lectures about the Cold War. But he is Marc Hilliard Fogel on his well-worn passports, abundantly stamped from his many years of teaching International Baccalaureate history courses at schools attended by the children of U.S. diplomats and the global elite in Colombia, Venezuela, Oman, Malaysia and, for the past 10 years, in Russia.</p> <p>Fogel’s charmed life has turned dark at the age of 60. He never sought notoriety. But he and his family slowly have come to the realization that telling the world his name could be his salvation.</p> <p>For the past 11 months, Fogel has languished in Russian detention centers following his August 2021 arrest for trying to enter the country with about half an ounce of medical marijuana he’d been prescribed in the United States for chronic pain after numerous injuries and surgeries. First he endlessly awaited trial, often in crowded, smoke-choked cells. More recently, he has been serving the first weeks of an incomprehensible 14-year sentence handed down by a Russian judge in June.</p> <p>Fogel’s plight parallels a similar case that has played big on news websites, led cable newscasts and prompted White House pronouncements: the trial of WNBA basketball star Brittney Griner, who also was arrested for attempting to enter Russia with a small amount of medical marijuana. On Wednesday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that the United States has made a “substantial proposal” to Russia to secure the release of Griner and another jailed American, Paul Whelan, who is serving a 16-year Russian sentence on spy charges he has denied.</p> <p>Marc Fogel’s wife, Jane Fogel, said in an interview after the news broke that she’s still hoping her husband can be included in a swap. But those hopes are fading, she said, speaking publicly for the first time about her husband’s case.</p> <p>“There’s a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that Marc will be left behind,” Jane Fogel said Wednesday after the announcement about the possible swap including Griner and Whelan. “It’s terrifying. I would hope that President Biden and especially first lady Jill Biden, who is an educator, realize the importance of including Marc in addition to Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan.”</p> <p>In suburban Pittsburgh, Jane Fogel has been watching the Griner case spool out and wondered whether her husband has been forgotten. Griner’s wife, Cherelle, received a call from the president. The Fogels have been stalled at the mid-functionary level of the U.S. State Department. Speculation about a possible prisoner swap before Blinken’s announcement on Wednesday had earlier trickled into his Russian prison cell, compounding his anxiety.</p> <p>“That hurt,” Marc Fogel wrote in a letter home referencing the prisoner-exchange reports. “Teachers are at least as important as bballers.”</p> <p>In an email reply to an inquiry from The Washington Post, a State Department official said the agency is aware of Fogel’s case but did not provide any further information, citing privacy reasons. The official did not respond to interview requests.</p> <p>After Biden’s call with Griner’s wife, the White House issued a summary of the conversation saying he told her the U.S. government was working hard to secure the release of Griner and another American and Whelan. Biden added that his administration is pushing for the release of “other” U.S. nationals imprisoned in Russia and other countries. Marc Fogel’s name did not appear.</p>

“It seems like the government is working really hard for Brittney Griner and Paul Whelan,” Jane Fogel, 60, said in an interview last week at her home, surrounded by mementos of the family’s world-wandering. “We want them to work for us, too.”

Jane Fogel was quick to point out that she’s hopeful Griner and Whelan will also be released. Griner herself has issued a statement pleading for the release of other Americans. It’s hard to escape the dread that her husband’s case will never become a priority. That she may never see him again. At times, she said, tearfully, she feels like a “widow.”

Encouraging students to ‘live life’

Marc Fogel was always the lucky one. No matter the tricky situation, he seemed to land on his feet, like a cat, his friends would say.

Personable, athletic, a little silly sometimes, the Pittsburgh-area native with that big radiant smile, the square jaw, the thick head of wavy hair, could chat up anyone. Things were forever falling into place for him. A madcap idea to hitchhike from Prince George’s County, where he was teaching at a public middle school, to see the 1994 Major League Baseball All-Star Game in Pittsburgh led to a chance encounter with his future wife, Jane, a high school friend he’d seen only occasionally since they graduated a decade-and-a-half earlier.

Marc Fogel had a kind of wanderlust that was irresistible. Lying on a beach in Thailand one New Year’s Eve in the mid-1990s, he and Jane came up with a plan — they’d get married, have children and teach abroad. Jane told her mother that she’d be back in eight months. It turned out to be 27 years.

They went to places that evoked fear and blank stares among their friends and family. And they gushed about them. The country house surrounded by flowers where they lived outside Medellín, Colombia; the home at the beach in Oman where their eldest son learned to snorkel. An exception was Caracas, Venezuela, where a neighbor was murdered and a student’s father was seriously injured in a shooting. Their movements became so limited because of safety concerns that their sons, Sam and Ethan, staged what they jokingly call “a coup” to get the family to move.

Former students remember Marc as an upbeat presence in their lives, who was always saying, “‘It’s a great day to be alive!’ He encouraged the students to also live life, not just ponder it,” said Jukka Haapakoski, a student of Marc’s in Kuala Lumpur in the 1990s who is now CEO of a Finnish organization that advocates on behalf of unemployed people.

In 2012, after leaving Caracas, the Fogels landed jobs at the Anglo-American School in Moscow, a prestigious \$34,000-a-year, pre-K-12 institution that had been established by the U.S., Canadian and British embassies. Their salaries were far beyond anything they could make teaching in the United States. They had an apartment on a vibrant Moscow street. They loved the place. They bopped around Europe visiting friends on school breaks.

They mingled with the embassy crowd and taught their kids. Michael McFaul, a Stanford University professor who was U.S. ambassador to Russia for part of the Fogels’ tenure in Moscow, said his son was captivated by Marc’s infectious teaching style.

“Mr. Fogel, as he called him, made him excited about these issues in a way that he’d never been before, despite having met [President] Barack Obama and all kinds of fancy people,” McFaul said.

In the past few years, as tensions between the United States and Russia grew, it became harder for the Fogels to persuade family and friends that they were in some kind of schoolteacher paradise.

“I would say, ‘What are you doing there? Putin is a monster,’” Marc’s sister, Elise Hyland, said. Her brother always responded by saying Russians are “lovely people,” and that “you have to understand their culture to understand what’s happening now,” Hyland recalled.

Marc was careful to avoid any impression that he was taking political positions, said his friend and fellow teacher, Steve Coffey. Sometimes they would change lunch plans just to avoid neighborhoods where demonstrations might be happening.

All the while, Marc's body was falling apart. He'd had surgeries on his back and shoulder, and a knee replacement. The pain was never-ending. He walked with a pronounced limp. Coffey remembers his friend's signature farewell after a long day: "All right, buddy, I'm going to go hit the bath."

Marc was adamant about not taking opioids. In 2021, a doctor recommended he try medical marijuana. It not only helped with the pain — he liked it in the same way someone else might like a glass of wine or a beer.

While home in Pennsylvania for the summer break in 2021, Marc and Jane had to decide whether they'd go back to Russia. Jane was hesitant to return, but her husband talked her into it. Just one more year. Then he would retire, and they could live in their snug Oakmont house with the big oak tree out back and the bay window overlooking the lawn. They could host barbecues. They could make new friends in their neighborhood.

After three decades abroad, a "normal" life, as she put it, sounded "exotic."

'I'm really in trouble'

On Aug. 14, 2021, the Fogels landed at Sheremetyevo airport in Moscow after the long flight from New York on the Russian airline Aeroflot. When they deplaned, Jane noticed they were in a different terminal than usual with more security, a change from the lax environment they'd encountered in previous years. She stopped at the restroom and her husband went ahead to the security checkpoint.

When she caught up with him, she could tell something was wrong. His breath had quickened so much that his mask was inflating and deflating like a balloon.

"Jane," he said, "I'm really in trouble."

He'd packed 14 vape cartridges of medical marijuana into his suitcase, stuffing some in his shoes, and placed some cannabis buds in a contact lens case, his wife said. Jane said she had no idea he'd done it. But why take such a risk?

"It's pretty simple," his son Ethan said of his father's plan to bring medical marijuana into Russia. "He thought he could get away with it."

Still, this lucky man, this man who always seemed to have things go his way, assumed this would be a situation that wouldn't end up so badly. Maybe he'd just get deported. Maybe he'd pay a fine or get a light punishment of some sort. Maybe.

Instead, the Russians charged him with drug possession and intent to sell marijuana to his students.

While waiting for his trial, Fogel kept a diary, pouring out his vacillating emotions, from optimism to despair and back again. On the first pages of a notebook with a blue cover, he scrawled 53 things that gave him hope or made him happy or that he looked forward to when — if — he won his freedom.

Number 1: "Jane is receiving 1,000s of supportive letters."

Number 8: "Another person got out after paying a fine."

Number 53: "I found a Frank Zappa picture in a Russian magazine."

He writes about the confusion and upheaval of being transferred over and over among the network of notorious pretrial detention centers. In one, he encounters a "guardian angel" whose brother sends them

boxes of food; he invents a cornhole-style game using “gruel bowls” and dried apricots. In another, he has to kneel to get nasty food passed through a small window in his cell, and he’s not allowed outside for days.

At one point he refers to his notebook as his “dark journal.” He suspects the Russians are trying to “break” him, employing a method of creating misery, “tried & true & right now I feel it in my bones, my soul, it teems throughout my body.” He senses a “lack of empathy from these heartless bastards.”

He chastises himself for ruining his life and that of his family. He dreams of scary bears. He wonders whether he’ll ever see his 93-year-old mother again. When he looks at his face in a mirror he thinks his “crying has carved new lines.”

‘He was stunned’

Marc Fogel did not deny trying to bring medical marijuana into Russia. What he asked for was leniency.

He promised the judge in his case that if he were released, he’d act almost like a tourism promoter, extolling the delights of Moscow and the affection he had for its residents — the same things he’d been telling his family and friends in the United States for years, according to Irina Pigman, a Russian-born business executive whose husband is from the United States.

Fogel thought he had a chance.

He probably didn’t.

U.S.-Russia relations were strained then, as they are now, by U.S. support for Ukraine after the Russian invasion in February 2022.

Russian prosecutors had painted him as a “large-scale” drug dealer intent on selling drugs to his students and falsely labeled him an employee of the U.S. Embassy, assertions that were repeated in some Western media accounts.

At The Post’s request, Jane Fogel provided documentation — payroll statements from two different years and an employee verification letter dated the month before his arrest — that shows her husband was employed by the Anglo-American School of Moscow. Additionally, McFaul, the former U.S. ambassador to Russia who befriended the Fogels in Moscow, said in an interview that Fogel was not an embassy employee or an American diplomat.

Jane Fogel also provided The Post with copies of her visas, which she said are the same type as those her husband received. At the time of his arrest, the school where they taught had sponsored their visa applications and they received a type of visa typically granted to professionals designated as “highly qualified specialists.”

In previous years, they’d received visas sponsored by the U.S. Embassy that labeled them “technical employees,” a term of art that allowed them to work in Russia at the invitation of the embassy and afforded them certain diplomatic protections, even though they were not employed by the U.S. government. The embassy was involved because the school had been chartered by the American, British and Canadian embassies but overseen by a separate school board. The change in the Fogels’ visa status took place in 2021 when the school transitioned to being a nonprofit institution.

On the June day that Fogel was sentenced, Pigman watched the former teacher’s face change as the Russian judge read a lengthy statement culminating in a 14-year sentence.

“It was like he grew old all of a sudden,” Pigman said in a telephone interview from her home in Moscow. “He was stunned.”

Three weeks later, Griner — the WNBA star who was detained in Russia on drug charges in February — pleaded guilty. She’s awaiting sentencing. The family of Whelan, the ex-Marine serving a long sentence

on spying charges, has been critical of the attention given to Griner's case by Biden. His sister said on CNN that she wished her brother was receiving similar treatment. Several days later Biden called her.

Jane Fogel remained quiet. She was following the guidance of U.S. officials and informal advisers who said public comments could make things worse for her husband. The tactic didn't seem to be working, and she's become increasingly impatient.

She has grown frustrated that she has not received more information from the State Department on her trips to Washington to discuss her husband's case. The officials are polite and empathetic, but they tell her almost nothing, she said. One of the most nettlesome and baffling dilemmas she's faced is that the State Department has not declared her husband "wrongfully detained," a designation granted to Whelan and Griner that would shift the handling of his case to the Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, which negotiates releases.

Richard Burt, a former U.S. ambassador to Germany who is now a powerhouse Washington lobbyist, is one of those pressing for the designation. Burt has told her that she's only made it to the sixth floor at the State Department, but that they need to get her to the seventh floor where Blinken, the secretary of state, and the other highest ranking U.S. diplomats have offices.

Burt and McFaul have quietly been nudging the U.S. government on behalf of the Fogels. McFaul says his conversations through private channels with U.S. officials have led him to believe Marc Fogel is "definitely on their radar. It's not just the other two Americans."

Fogel is planning to appeal his conviction, but it's highly unlikely that imprisoned Americans can win release by going through the Russian court system. (The Fogels draw some hope from the possible precedent of a case involving Audrey Lorber, an American teenager whose was released from prison in 2019, one month after being caught bringing marijuana into Russia.)

McFaul has come to the conclusion that the "only viable option" for Griner, Whelan and Fogel is a prisoner exchange. In April, retired U.S. Marine Trevor Reed, who had been sentenced to nine years in prison, was exchanged for a Russian pilot who had been in a U.S. jail since 2010.

At home, Jane Fogel listens to talk of a prisoner swap and fights the urge to get her hopes too high.

One recent evening, McFaul sent her a clip of him discussing prisoner swaps during a cable news segment. Fogel pulled it up on her phone at the dinner table.

Unprompted, McFaul mentioned his "friend" who'd taught in Russia and was now serving 14 years in a Russian prison. There was a pause. She leaned forward and heard the anchor say what she'd been longing to hear.

Her mouth curled into a wide smile and she let out a little yip of delight: "They said his name!"

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HEADLINE	07/27 School mask mandates return amid surge
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/07/27/school-mask-mandates-return/
GIST	<p>Mask mandates are making a comeback at public schools in Louisville. They could return to Los Angeles, after a possible decision this week. And outside Atlanta, where classes start in a matter of days, they are required for school employees.</p> <p>This is not what school leaders hoped for when they pictured the lead-up to the 2022-2023 school year. But a sizable swath of the country is seeing a surge of covid-19 cases, according to data posted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>

For another year, educators are scrambling to adjust to covid's fluctuations. [CDC data shows a "high" covid-19 "community level"](#) — a measure of case and hospitalization rates — in hundreds of counties, as the [omicron subvariants BA.4 and BA.5](#) have spread.

"Everybody wishes we didn't have to wear masks, but the health experts recommend we wear them to keep people safe," said Bernard Watson, spokesman for [Gwinnett County](#) Public Schools in Georgia, where the community level is high and more than 20,000 employees will be required to wear face coverings in buildings if the area remains at a high level on the first day of school, Aug. 3. Students are strongly encouraged to mask but are not included in the mandate because of a recent state law called the ["Unmask Georgia Students Act,"](#) which lets parents decide whether their children wear masks at school.

But while some school districts are following [CDC guidance](#), which recommends universal masking indoors when community levels are high, others are taking a mask-optional approach. Some school systems have not decided, hoping the virus wanes before they open.

In San Diego, school district officials mandated masks indoors on July 18, when CDC data showed San Diego County hit a high covid level and summer school was in session. But officials said this week they have not made a decision about mask-wearing when the regular school year starts on Aug. 29.

"Local health experts have advised that although cases are high now, our county could be out of the 'high' level by the end of August when classes resume," officials of the San Diego Unified School District said in an email.

Critics condemned the San Diego decision. "The transmission parents fear is the mask mandates spreading across the country," said Sharon McKeeman, a vocal opponent of masks and the founder of the advocacy group [Let Them Breathe](#).

In nearby Los Angeles, health officials were [considering a countywide indoor mask mandate](#) for a list of settings, including schools, after the area reached a high covid community level in mid-July. But on Tuesday, officials said that improving conditions could delay the decision, which had been expected Thursday.

Meanwhile, it is unclear whether the CDC plans to issue more guidance for schools as they reopen. A CDC spokeswoman declined to say. "We are constantly evaluating our guidance and as new science based evidence emerges necessary updates are made," CDC spokeswoman Kristen Nordlund said in a statement. The most recent recommendations came in [a CDC update from May](#).

Daniel Domenech, of the AASA, the national school superintendents association, said intense political pressure affects decision-making. Even in high-risk areas, "there's such resistance on the part of parents, on the part of the community, on the part of politicians ... that a lot of people just throw their hands up in the air, and say, 'Fine, no masks.' "

Masking has been a hallmark of school life for most of the past two school years, but it has increasingly become cast as a choice, not a requirement, at a time of widespread vaccinations and testing, and rampant mask fatigue.

Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, said it is clear that masking takes a toll in the classroom — when students with asthma find it difficult to breathe, for example, or when children cannot pick up on cues from teachers because they can't see their entire faces.

"I completely understand both sides of this — the side that says they're an impediment to learning and the side that says that when the omicron variant is rising, we need to have it," Weingarten said. Still, she said, "the wars around masking have been very undermining of teaching and learning."

In Nashville, where the community level is high, schools will open Aug. 8 with optional masking, said spokesman Sean Braisted. Tennessee had sought to ban mask mandates, but [a federal judge barred the state from doing so](#). The school board last voted in February to encourage but not require mask use, Braisted said.

In Kentucky, the 96,000-student school system in Jefferson County — where Louisville is located — chose from Day 1 to follow CDC guidance, so when it [reached a high level of covid last week](#), the mask mandate was revived for buildings and school buses, said spokesman Mark Hebert. School starts Aug. 10.

“Universal masking is required until Jefferson County is no longer in the red (high) level,” school officials wrote in a July 22 message to families and staffers. “We will update you on the masking status at the end of each week.”

In Georgia’s Clayton County, with a high covid community level, the indoor mask mandate includes employees, contractors and visitors starting in July 25, said spokeswoman Jada Dawkins. Schools Superintendent Morcease Beasley said he did not want anything to get in the way of being able to greet students from day one, she said. If state law allowed, Beasley would require students be masked too, Dawkins said.

“Each community is different,” said John Heim, the executive director of the National School Boards Association. “Whereas one community may feel masks are necessary, another may not. That’s why masking decisions should be made at the local level, based on local health data and input from parents, students, educators, and other community members.”

In Maryland, [the mask mandate](#) in Prince George’s County, the state’s second-largest school system, was [the longest in the state, ending only July 1](#). But the coming academic year is different: The school system decided to be mask-optional. The county is at a “medium” covid community level, according to [CDC data](#).

Caitlin Rivers, an epidemiologist and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, pointed out that state and local decisions will fluctuate in response to changing case numbers. Policies will be rolled back when numbers drop, she said, “but if it intensifies enough to strain the health-care system, for example, then that’s the time to reintroduce controls.”

And despite pandemic fatigue, high community levels of covid should mean school masking and surveillance testing, said Meagan Fitzpatrick, an epidemiologist and a modeler of infectious-disease transmission at the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

“Schools should not ignore that covid exists,” Fitzpatrick said. “If schools don’t take steps to interrupt covid, [then] covid will interrupt the school year.”

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HEADLINE	07/27 Violence against women under Taliban
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/27/afghanistan-women-taliban-rights-violence-amnesty-international/
GIST	<p>Women in Afghanistan have faced an onslaught of violence and human rights abuses since the Taliban’s return to national power less than a year ago — and the “scope, magnitude and severity” of violations are “increasing month to month,” according to a new report by Amnesty International.</p> <p>Shortly after sweeping into Kabul in August 2021, the Taliban offered assurances that it would respect the rights of women, in a society that saw drastic changes in the decades since the Taliban had last held power. But journalists and activists swiftly called that narrative into question and began to amass evidence of a different reality.</p>

The 98-page [report](#) was released Wednesday and relies on interviews with more than 100 women, girls, staff members at detention centers, experts and journalists, collected by researchers abroad and on the ground over nine months. The report reveals the extent to which the Taliban has limited the freedoms of women and girls by imposing harsh, arbitrary, punishments — from forcibly detaining women for appearing in public without a male chaperone, to physical and psychological torture in confinement.

The rights group documented accounts indicating a dramatic increase in child marriages and marital rape since the Taliban's takeover. In some cases, the report says, the Taliban told survivors of domestic violence they would be sent to shelters, but imprisoned them instead.

Former detainees said imprisonment carries a lifelong stigma because women are so often subjected to sexual violence in jail. According to the report, one former activist said that when she was arrested, her only thought was about the stigma she would face.

"Once you go to the prison, it's a big deal," she said. "You have no dignity afterward because everyone will say you were raped."

The Taliban's "draconian policies are depriving millions of women and girls of their right to lead safe, free and fulfilling lives," Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's secretary general, said in the report.

Upon seizing the capital, the Taliban were quick to shutter schools for girls. Although they were meant to reopen in March, the Taliban's Ministry of Education issued a last-minute reversal that banned girls beyond the sixth grade from returning. Images and videos of young women and girls [crying outside their schools](#) circulated on social media and local television.

"Taken together, these policies form a system of repression that discriminates against women and girls in almost every aspect of their lives," Callamard said. "Every daily detail — whether they go to school, if and how they work, if and how they leave the house — is controlled and heavily restricted."

Since taking de facto authority, the Taliban has [imprisoned dozens of women's rights activists](#), restricted access to [education for women and girls](#) and barred women from going to work because of their potential proximity to men.

Amnesty International interviewed witnesses in Afghanistan who said that women who peacefully protested the discrimination were met with harassment and beaten — in apparent violation of international law, the group alleges.

Afghanistan is enduring a grinding humanitarian crisis, compounded by the Taliban's rise to power last summer. The majority of the world cut formal diplomatic ties and slashed international aid, plunging millions of Afghans deeper into poverty and [hunger](#). Last month, a devastating [earthquake](#) struck a remote region in the country's east, killing more than 1,000 people and displacing many more.

The United States attempted to unfreeze funds to support quake victims but bypassing the Taliban proved to be a logistical challenge.

The Amnesty International report calls on the Taliban to implement major policy changes that roll back infringements on the basic rights of women and girls and also urges governments and international organizations, including all United Nations member states, to address these issues with more urgency.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Concern: militia presence at Oak fire
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-07-27/militia-presence-at-massive-oak-fire-sparks-concern
GIST	MARIPOSA, Calif. — Nearly 3,000 firefighters and first responders have flooded the Sierra foothills of Mariposa County battling the explosive Oak fire , but it's the guys in camouflage fatigues and surplus war vehicles that have most alarmed some evacuees and monitors of extremist groups.

As fire crews made headway Tuesday against a blaze that has roared through 18,000 acres, destroyed 25 homes and forced thousands to flee their homes, the presence of a self-described militia whose members handed out food and offered help to evacuees has raised concerns among some.

Calling itself the Echo Company of the California State Militia's 2nd Regiment, the group had set up a field kitchen off Highway 140 recently and told the Merced Sun-Star it was offering food, water and a place to stay for those in need. Online, the group posts videos of members training with rifles, shields and other equipment, along with the group's tagline: "We who dare."

The Mariposa County Sheriff's Office announced on Facebook on Sunday that it had been "made aware" of the presence of a local militia in the area. "We appreciate their efforts and any of the efforts of other private groups or entities helping our community," the statement read.

But those who monitor extremist groups questioned whether their actions were truly altruistic.

Self-described militia groups have often inserted themselves into natural disaster zones, they said. Sometimes the groups claim to provide help and supplies, while actually promoting right-wing extremist ideologies, anti-government sentiment and conspiracy theories.

"It puts these groups in a positive light and extends to them a type of de-facto authority that they really don't have under the law, which poses significant issues," said Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at Cal State San Bernardino. "When you have a system that allows unregulated extremists to cosplay at times of disaster, you get, well, unqualified extremists cosplaying at times of disaster."

The Sheriff's Office had not requested the militia's presence and said members were acting on "their own courteous accord."

"The public should be aware that the militia has not been activated or requested to act for any purpose by the Sheriff's Office or any agency working the Oak fire," the agency said on Facebook. "We are not unsupportive of groups helping those affected by the Oak fire, however, it is important that we inform the community of resources available to them by the incident and Mariposa County."

The group's presence came as firefighters appeared to make significant gains, even after the fire had destroyed 41 structures and kept thousands from their homes.

The northeast side of the fire was continuing to push against steep terrain and was at risk of bumping around the 2018 Ferguson fire burn scar, which could then ignite new brush and forest and make the fire harder to control, said Escondido Fire Department public information officer Dominic Polito, who was working with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection on the blaze.

"If it runs up around the Ferguson scar, then we're off to the races," he said. "If not, then we're looking very good."

By Tuesday, the fire reached 26% containment, according to Cal Fire. Several residents were allowed to return to their homes by Friday evening as evacuation orders for some areas were reduced to fire advisements.

Still, about 1,440 buildings remained threatened as the fire continued to press on the eastern boundary, and firefighters continued to fight through steep terrain.

"The terrain is very slippery," said Fresno Fire Capt. Chris Garcia. "Even putting firefighters up there is very hazardous. What can happen when walking is a dislodged rock can hit another firefighter, and we're currently hitting a lot of snags, which is what we call a burnt out tree that ends up falling."

Those residents that had been forced to flee were still reeling from the blur of packing up what they could and leaving their homes in uncertainty.

“I had never seen [smoke] that close before,” said Richard Perez, a 40-year resident of Mariposa County. He and his wife packed their belongings and stuffed them into two cars, including their dogs and chickens. “That’s my dream home, you know,” he said, “I worked my whole life to finally get a place.”

They ushered their three German shepherds into one car, and 11 of their chickens in the other. After one night at a local hotel, they stayed at the American Red Cross shelter at Mariposa Elementary along with about 40 other evacuees.

“I’ve been there for 20 years, and to lose everything,” he said, his voice trailing off. “It’s just material stuff, but it’s home.”

It’s residents like Perez that the uniformed militia group said it was looking to help.

Daniel Latner, a member of the group, told the Mercury News that around 20 members arrived with large military-surplus vehicles to help feed residents. Members, he said, were not armed.

Yet some residents found their presence unsettling.

“The last thing I’m going to do is take a free tri-tip sandwich from a right-wing extremist group,” a woman, who declined to be identified citing fear of provoking the group, told the Mercury News.

The group in Mariposa County had once been affiliated with a larger militia with a similar name, but the larger militia cut ties with Echo Company because of an incident in 2020, it said, when they inserted armed members between Black Lives Matter supporters and pro-police groups in a protest in Atwater.

In a 2020 statement, the larger group wrote online that it disavowed Echo Company because of “potential legal liability in light of the continued militant activities of other units,” and called the actions “inciteful.”

The Mariposa County Sheriff’s Office did not respond to requests for comment.

The presence of militia in natural disaster zones can seem well-intentioned, but can in fact be harmful because members are taking on actions that can interfere with trained government agencies that are coordinating a response, Levin said.

Many extremists groups are also known to use similar incidents to gain media attention and recruit new members.

Militia groups have also gained newfound scrutiny after the involvement of similar groups in the Jan. 6 insurrection in Washington, D.C. Members of groups including the Oath Keepers — which years earlier had appeared at hurricane zones and conducted trainings for local residents to prepare for natural disasters — have been indicted for their alleged role in the attack.

Levin said he is also concerned that, even if the group is providing assistance to residents, law enforcement’s subtle approval raises questions about the public’s interaction with them.

“If it turns out there’s extremists within those ranks, that’s a critical juncture where people are at their most vulnerable,” he said. “Vulnerable people at vulnerable times require a qualified response, and they don’t need to be exposed to the possibility of extremism.”

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SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/we-are-not-trying-to-displace-anyone-mayor-harrell-fields-criticisms-of-homeless-sweeps-during-heatwave
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell faced criticism Wednesday as the city continues to tear down homeless camps during the current heat wave.</p> <p>An encampment on Third Avenue in the SODO district, which once had 20 RVs, was cleared on Tuesday.</p> <p>City Councilmember Tammy Morales called the removal "a continued failure of our city's response to addressing the root causes of homelessness."</p> <p>"Being swept is challenging enough without the added stressor of the scorching temperature" said Morales, arguing that adequate services must be provided, "before the City displaces them, especially during dangerous weather events."</p> <p>The King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA), the new agency that places unsheltered people into some form of temporary or permanent housing, opposed the forced removal.</p> <p>"The Regional Homelessness Authority does not support displacement," said spokesperson Anne Martens. "We work with partners to resolve an encampment resolution; that means every person has an opportunity to come inside with dignity."</p> <p>At a news conference announcing his nomination of a new Department of Transportation director, Harrell said he is not "displacing" people in the heat wave.</p> <p>"We are not trying to sweep or displace anyone, we are trying to treat and house people, and we will continue to do that with the resources we have," said Harrell. "It's too hot for people to live in some of these conditions."</p> <p>Lux is one of many living in an RV on the street, and she arranged for her RV to be towed by a friend three blocks away before the removal began.</p> <p>"It does suck to see them come with, like, big dumpsters, just throwing everything away," said Lux. "As much as a lot of it is trash, it still sucks to see it torn apart as if it means nothing."</p> <p>Lux is 19 years old and has been living on the streets of Seattle since she was 15. She shares an RV with a friend.</p> <p>"I have seen them remove people almost like clockwork," said Lux.</p> <p>Over the last several months, without any fanfare, the Harrell administration has been clearing tent and RV camps two to three times a week.</p> <p>When asked by FOX 13 News if his administration will continue with that schedule, amid the criticism and high heat, he intimated it would.</p> <p>"Our administration is getting praised for the work of getting people out of this heat wave into cooling centers, into treatment and housing; that's what we are doing," said Harrell. "We are doing in a very compassionate and human approach."</p> <p>We spoke with one person who was offered a place at a tiny house village, and two others who never received offers of housing. All three had been staying at the Third Avenue RV camp before it was cleared.</p> <p>Lux said she never received a direct offer of housing from outreach workers.</p> <p>"It wasn't like, 'Hey would you like to get housing?'" said Lux. "I haven't heard anything like that from them."</p>

	<p>Joe Ingram of the Interfaith Task Force on Homelessness routinely provides outreach to people living in vehicles, but does not have permission from the KCRHA or the city to offer any housing.</p> <p>"The mayor and his administration have declared war on people living in vehicles; relentless, unforgiving and they don't care," said Ingram.</p> <p>The city has scheduled another RV camp removal in the city's Eastlake neighborhood on Thursday.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/28 Hunt for 'war trophies' in Ukraine is on
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/world/europe/ukraine-war-military-artifacts.html
GIST	<p>KYIV — When Ihor Sumliennyi, a young environmental activist, arrived at the site of a recent missile strike, the rubble had barely stopped smoking.</p> <p>Police officers guarded the street. People who had lived in the smashed apartment building stared in disbelief, some making the sign of the cross next to him. He started poking around.</p> <p>And then, bam! His eyes lit up. Right in front of him, lying near the sidewalk, was exactly what he was looking for: a mangled chunk of shrapnel, a piece of the actual Russian cruise missile that had slammed into the building.</p> <p>He scooped it up, pricking himself in the process on the jagged steel edges, stuffed it in his backpack and briskly walked the hour home — "I didn't want the police to stop me and think I was a terrorist."</p> <p>That ugly chunk of steel has now become the star of his "war trophies" collection, which spans everything from ammunition tins and a used rocket-propelled grenade shaft to a pair of black Russian boots he found in the battered city of Bucha.</p> <p>"Those have really bad energy," he said.</p> <p>It might seem eccentric, even macabre, to collect war debris like this. But Mr. Sumliennyi isn't the only one. Across Ukraine, many civilians and soldiers are foraging for shrapnel pieces, mortar fins, spent bullet casings and bits of bombs.</p> <p>Ukrainian artists are weaving them into their work. Auction houses are moving discarded pieces of weapons and other battlefield finds, raising thousands of dollars for Ukrainian soldiers. One woman is even making sculptures from the uniforms of dead Russians.</p> <p>It clearly speaks to something bigger. So many Ukrainians want to be on the front lines — or to somehow feel connected to the cause even if they are far from the fighting or don't see themselves as cut out for combat. With patriotism cresting and their country's existence at stake, they are seeking out something tangible they can hold in their hands that represents this enormous, overwhelming moment. They crave their own little piece of history.</p> <p>"Each piece has a story," said Serhii Petrov, a well-known artist working in Lviv. He's now incorporating spent bullet cartridges into the masks he makes.</p> <p>As he handled one, he mused, "Maybe it was someone's last bullet."</p> <p>At a charity auction in Lviv on Sunday, Valentyn Lapotkov, a computer programmer, paid more than \$500 for an empty missile tube that had been used, the auctioneers said, to blow up a Russian armored personnel carrier. He said that when he touched it he felt "close to our heroes."</p>

Memorializing the war, even when it's likely far from over, is a way to show solidarity with the soldiers and those who have suffered. One of Kyiv's biggest museums recently staged [an exhibition of war artifacts collected since the Russians invaded in February](#). The rooms are full of gas masks, missile tubes and charred debris. The message is clear: See, this is what real war really looks like.

On a personal level, Mr. Sumliennyi is doing something similar. Thirty-one years old, he's an auditor by training but a climate justice activist by heart. From Kyiv, he works with Greta Thunberg's [Fridays for Future](#) movement, organizing social media campaigns against fossil fuels, and during the hundreds of video calls he makes, he shows off his war trophies. He also sends some out of the country with female activists to "go on tour" (he can't travel himself, because of Ukraine's ban on military-age men leaving the country).

"It's very interesting," explained Mr. Sumliennyi, who is tall and lean and lives in a tiny apartment with his mother. "You don't feel the war through television or the news. But if you show people these pieces, they feel it."

That's exactly what one young Polish woman said after Mr. Sumliennyi leaned out of the frame during a video call and returned with his trophies.

"It was mind-blowing," said the woman, [Dominika Lasota, a climate justice activist from Warsaw](#). "I automatically started to laugh at it, in shock, but then realized how dystopian this moment was."

"Thor seemed to be all chill about it," she added of Mr. Sumliennyi. "He actually showed that piece of the bomb with pride — he was smiling."

It's a coping mechanism, he explained. "Without black humor, we can't live in the war," he said. "It's a protection reaction for the organism."

Still, he and his friends handle the war objects carefully, almost as solemnly as soldiers would fold a flag for a fallen comrade.

"When I touch this," he said of the missile piece he recovered in April, "I feel really bad energy in my fingers."

He said he had spoken to weapons experts and determined the five-pound chunk was part of the tail of a Russian Kalibr cruise missile.

In Lviv, Tetiana Okhten helps run the [UAID foundation](#), a volunteer network that, among the many things it's doing, has sold more than 15 pieces of war debris, including several missile and rocket tubes used by the Ukrainian military that are big hits. All told, the war debris has netted more than \$4,000, which the foundation spends on protective vests, medicine and other supplies for Ukrainian troops.

"We are taking things used to kill people to now save lives," she said.

She said that one young Ukrainian soldier fighting in the Donbas region has been a huge help in finding things from the front lines. He has jumped out of trenches even as Russian shells were exploding around him and fellow soldiers were yelling at him to take cover. But, she said, he's close to a bunch of volunteers and yells back, "I have to go. My friends need this stuff!"

In frontline areas, some shellshocked residents were surprised to learn that pieces of war debris were becoming collectors' items.

"That's crazy," said Vova Hurzhyi, who lives in a Donbas town that the Russians keep attacking. "This stuff is coming here to kill you."

	<p>Still, Mr. Sumliennyi keeps hunting. A few weeks ago, he and some environmentalist friends drove to Bucha, a Kyiv suburb where Russian troops slaughtered hundreds of civilians, to take photos for a social media campaign about the connection between fossil fuels and Russia's war machine.</p> <p>Just by chance, they stumbled into a backyard where they found a Russian military jacket and the pair of black boots (size 10). They remain among his prized items.</p> <p>"We didn't go to Bucha looking for this," he said. "We just got lucky."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/28 Domestic opposition to Putin invites jail
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/world/europe/domestic-opposition-to-putin-invites-jail-dividing-activists-over-the-wisdom-of-staying-put-to-fight.html
GIST	<p>Shortly after Russia shocked the world by attacking Ukraine on Feb. 24, Ilya V. Yashin, a local Moscow councilman and prominent opposition figure, decided it was time to see a dentist.</p> <p>The Kremlin was in the process of criminalizing criticism of the war, and Mr. Yashin, a very vocal critic, had decided to stay in his home country and continue to oppose President Vladimir V. Putin. Eventually, he reasoned, jail time was highly likely.</p> <p>"I'm honestly terrified of dentists," Mr. Yashin said in a recent interview on YouTube, "but I got ahold of myself and did it because I realized that if I ended up in prison, there wouldn't be any dentists there."</p> <p>Two weeks after the interview was published, Mr. Yashin, 39, was indeed arrested. He is now in pretrial detention in Moscow, on charges of "disseminating false information" about the war. He faces a sentence of up to 10 years.</p> <p>Mr. Yashin's arrest highlights the rapidly constricting avenues for dissent inside Russia as Mr. Putin cracks down on any divergence from the official narrative of the invasion. Beyond that, it has reignited the debate among the Russian opposition over how leading figures like Mr. Yashin can best serve the cause of undermining Mr. Putin: outside the country they want to reform, or inside a penal colony?</p> <p>Mr. Yashin remains convinced he made the right choice. "What crime did I commit?" he asked rhetorically in a handwritten letter from prison to The New York Times. "On my YouTube channel, I criticized the special military operation in Ukraine and openly called what is going on a war."</p> <p>But some opposition figures disagree, saying that staying and fighting might seem courageous, but that prison is an ineffective platform for pushing reforms.</p> <p>"Yashin is fearless — he is a fighter, he is brave," said Dmitri G. Gudkov, a Russian opposition leader who left Russia last year. "I am sure that he will not back down," he continued. "But I'm just sad that he will waste his life. It's not understandable."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Britain grid: tight winter energy supply
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/27/world/europe/britain-energy-crisis-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>Britain's power grid raised the prospect of a tight energy supply this winter, publishing an unusual early forecast to help the energy industry prepare for strains over the winter related to the fallout from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>"While Britain is not reliant on Russian gas to the extent that the rest of Europe is, it is clear that the cessation of flows of gas into Europe could have knock-on impacts, including very high prices," Britain's National Grid said in a new report.</p>

	<p>The organization said it would cope with expensive and unpredictable energy, along with any outages, by delaying the closure of coal plants and encouraging greater participation in “demand side response” from energy users.</p> <p>That seemed like a reference to the possible need for individuals to accept limits on electricity, which is now a threat for residents of many European countries.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the European Union agreed to cut its use of gas by up to 15 percent by the spring in response to “Putin’s energy blackmail,” according to a statement by Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, the bloc’s executive arm.</p> <p>Russia’s flow of gas into Europe fell to one-third of its average in June. The continent normally relies on Russian sources for 40 percent of its gas consumption.</p> <p>Russia’s apparent attempt to pressure E.U. governments is in response to E.U. sanctions against Russia over the war in Ukraine. On Aug. 1, the E.U. will ban the import of Russian coal, and by the end of the year, it will ban most Russian oil imports.</p> <p>Unlike many European countries, Britain produces substantial amounts of its own gas, but it has still faced skyrocketing energy prices in recent months.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 UN: HIV infections persistently high
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/27/health/hiv-infections-un aids.html
GIST	<p>While the world’s attention was riveted on the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the fight against an older foe lost crucial ground: More than 1.5 million people became infected with H.I.V. last year, roughly three times the global target, the United Nations reported on Wednesday.</p> <p>Roughly 650,000 people died of AIDS in 2021, about one every minute, according to U.N.AIDS, the organization’s program on H.I.V. and AIDS. Progress against the disease has faltered, and global infections have held steady since 2018.</p> <p>The toll in 2021 was uneven, as people ages 15 to 24 years — and young women in particular — carried a disproportionate share of the burden. One new infection in an adolescent girl or young woman occurred every two minutes, the program said.</p> <p>In sub-Saharan Africa, young people accounted for 31 percent of new infections, and nearly four in five of them were among girls and young women. In El Salvador, the prevalence of H.I.V. almost doubled among men who have sex with men and rose about eightfold among transgender people.</p> <p>In Asia and the Pacific, new H.I.V. infections were rising where they had been falling. And about 160,000 children worldwide became infected, despite the availability of prevention methods.</p> <p>“These numbers should represent more than just a sounding of the alarm — this should represent a full stop,” said Stephaun Wallace, an epidemiologist at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.</p> <p>In most countries, including the United States, only privileged groups tend to have consistent access to prevention and treatment for H.I.V., Dr. Wallace said. “Groups that are oppressed in different parts of the world, or essentially lower on the social hierarchy, are not given the same access,” he said.</p> <p>An estimated 40 million people are living with H.I.V. worldwide. About 10 million of them, including about half of infected children, do not have access to treatment.</p>

Fortunately, many of those who were already receiving treatment continued to do so in 2021, thanks in part to innovative H.I.V. programs in some countries. But the past two years have brought unrelenting waves of hardship, especially in low- and middle-income countries, that have disrupted the prevention and diagnosis of H.I.V.

Millions of girls were out of school as the coronavirus spread, and teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence soared. The pandemic sent poverty rates and fuel costs skyrocketing.

The Ukraine war has led to a further spike in food prices and constraints in supply chains.

“When there’s an economic crisis, women — particularly young women — are going to be more reliant on transactional sex as a source of income,” said Harsha Thirumurthy, an economist at the University of Pennsylvania. “It is not exclusively, but by and large, an economic story.”

In 2021, debt repayment for low-income countries comprised 171 percent of the spending on health care, education and social protection combined. Donor countries tightened the purse strings, and H.I.V. funding from countries other than the United States fell by 57 percent over the past decade, according to the report.

Low- and middle-income countries will need an estimated \$29 billion to tackle H.I.V. through 2025, but will face a shortfall of about \$8 billion.

“These figures are about political will,” Winnie Byanyima, the executive director of U.N.AIDS, said in a statement.

“Do we care about empowering and protecting our girls?” she added. “Do we want to stop AIDS deaths among children? Do we put saving lives ahead of criminalization? If we do, then we must get the AIDS response back on track.”

The response in some countries has been colored by the fact that people in marginalized communities are among those at highest risk.

In Australia, Canada and the United States, new H.I.V. infections are higher among Black people and Indigenous communities compared with white people. Men who have sex with men, drug users and sex workers — who together account for about 70 percent of global infections — have about 30 times the risk of infection, compared with others in the population.

Effective global policies should take these realities into account; it’s about “more than handing people condoms and lube,” Dr. Wallace said.

In an ideal world, for example, young women would have unfettered access to reproductive health services without stigma or judgment from their families, communities or houses of worship. Dr. Thirumurthy suggested that cash transfer programs might be just as essential as medical tools in slowing new infections among girls.

At a meeting in 2016, U.N. member countries set new goals for 2020: fewer than 500,000 new H.I.V. infections annually, fewer than 500,000 AIDS-related deaths annually, and elimination of H.I.V.-related discrimination. The nations did not meet those targets.

The world is also unlikely to reach another goal: a reduction to 370,000 new infections annually by 2025. The new report estimated that the real number is likely to be three times as high.

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HEADLINE	07/28 Rural: Covid hits Blacks, Hispanics hardest
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/28/health/covid-deaths-black-hispanic-rural.html

The coronavirus pandemic walloped rural America last year, precipitating a surge of deaths among white residents as the virus inflamed longstanding health deficits there.

But across the small towns and farmlands, [new research has found](#), Covid killed Black and Hispanic people at considerably higher rates than it did their white neighbors. Even at the end of the pandemic's second year, in February 2022, overstretched health systems, poverty, chronic illnesses and lower vaccination rates were forcing nonwhite people to bear the burden of the virus.

Black and Hispanic people in rural areas suffered an exceptionally high toll, dying at far higher rates than in cities during that second year of the pandemic.

In towns and cities of every size, racial gaps in Covid deaths have narrowed. That has been especially true recently, when major gains in populationwide immunity have tempered the kind of pressure on health systems that appears to hurt nonwhite Americans the most.

With [coronavirus deaths climbing](#), though, and health officials bracing for an even deadlier winter, scientists warned that efforts so far to close the racial gap in vaccination rates had not been enough to insulate nonwhite people from the ravages of major Covid waves.

Nowhere were those difficulties more pronounced than in rural areas. Black, Hispanic and Native American people in those places recorded the deadliest second year of the pandemic of any large racial or ethnic groups anywhere in the United States, according to the new research, which was led by Andrew Stokes, an assistant professor of global health at Boston University.

In those communities, the Biden administration's reassurances that every Covid death is now preventable jar with the difficulties of obtaining medical care.

Rural pharmacies are often [few and far between](#), making it difficult for poorer and less mobile residents to receive critical antiviral pills.

Doctors said that some Black patients, especially those who are uninsured or far from hospitals, wait too long before seeking help to benefit from new treatments.

And Black and Hispanic people have received booster shots at lower rates, a consequence of what some physicians describe as a lack of awareness stemming from cutbacks to public messaging, especially in conservative states.

"The national vibe is that everyone should now be in a position to do what they need to protect themselves from the virus," said Bobby Jenkins, the mayor of Cuthbert, Ga., a mostly Black town whose only hospital closed six months into the pandemic. "But not everyone's in a position to do that yet."

Racial disparities in Covid deaths have narrowed for several reasons, scientists said. The early vaccine rollout prioritized older Americans, who are disproportionately white. But over the last year, primary vaccinations for Black and Hispanic people climbed at roughly double the pace of white rates.

The rate for Hispanic people, 54 percent, now exceeds that for white people, which is 50 percent. The Black vaccination rate, 43 percent, still lags, but the gap has diminished.

The virus also infected and killed Black and Hispanic people at such greater rates in the pandemic's first year — at one point in 2020, Black rural dwellers were dying at roughly six times the rate of white dwellers — that it may have had fewer targets by Year 2.

Those changes have been so profound that among the oldest Americans, white Covid death rates have recently exceeded those of Black people, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

But the shrinking of the racial gap is partly because of a worsening of the pandemic for white people rather than serious advances for Black or Hispanic Americans. White Covid death rates climbed by 35 percent from the first to second year of the pandemic, the C.D.C. found. Over that period, death rates fell by only 1 percent in Hispanic people and 6 percent in Black people.

“It’s not a movement toward equity,” said Alicia Riley, a sociologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz. “It’s that white people started getting and dying of Covid more.”

The national picture has also disguised a shift that has as much to do with geography as with race, Dr. Stokes said. As the brunt of the pandemic shifted in late 2020 from big cities to rural areas, which have a bigger share of white residents, the national tally of Covid deaths naturally came to include more white people.

But within rural areas, Covid deaths were apportioned at greater rates to nonwhite people, just as they were in big cities and in small or medium ones, Dr. Stokes’s team found. He used C.D.C. counts of Covid death certificates up until February, avoiding more recent and potentially incomplete data, and took into account the older age of the white population.

At the worst of the Omicron wave this winter, Black and Hispanic death rates exceeded those of white people in towns and cities of every size, just as they had at the peak of every previous virus outbreak.

Black death rates at this winter’s peak were greater than those of white people by 34 percent in rural areas, 40 percent in small or medium cities and 57 percent in big cities and their suburbs. The racial gap was so large in cities because white urbanites have died from Covid at vastly lower rates than white people in rural areas for most of the pandemic.

Dr. Stokes said that the findings demonstrated that whether people lived in a big city or small town sometimes had as much to do with their experience of Covid as the part of the country where they lived. In the pandemic’s second year, ending in February 2022, rural parts of the West, South and Northeast all experienced surging white Covid deaths, despite stark differences in those regions’ containment strategies.

“It’s not enough to look at Massachusetts versus Texas,” Dr. Stokes said. “You have to look at rural Massachusetts versus rural Texas.”

Heading into a critical fall booster campaign, Dr. Stokes said, the results spoke to a need for much more proactive vaccination plans tailored to Black Americans, especially rural ones. “Adopting equitable vaccine strategies requires us to go above and beyond simply making them available,” he said.

In small and medium cities and rural areas across the South, where protective policies were rare, Black people suffered among the highest Covid death rates of any racial or ethnic group in any region in the second year of the pandemic, Dr. Stokes found.

Among those killed was Jacqueline Lowery, 28, a middle school science teacher and single mother of two in Darlington, S.C., a mostly Black city of 6,000. Having just given birth to a son, Ms. Lowery hesitated to be inoculated because she worried — without needing to — that the vaccine would contaminate her breast milk.

When she called a cousin, Jessica Brigman, a nurse, in September to say that she had fallen ill, Ms. Brigman urged her to see a doctor. But Ms. Lowery, who had obesity and gestational diabetes, had another priority: She had not yet tested positive for the virus, and she needed to before she could qualify for Covid pay from her employer. In the meantime, she was using up valuable sick days.

“She was the sole provider, and she had to pay bills, and she wasn’t going to get paid because she’d missed a solid week of school,” Mrs. Brigman said of her cousin’s worries. “They kept telling her she needed proof of positive Covid status.”

By the time she got a positive Covid result, Ms. Lowery was hospitalized, Mrs. Brigman said. About a week later, with blood clotting near her lungs, she died from Covid as she was being transported to a better-equipped North Carolina hospital. Mrs. Brigman remembered her cousin's anxiety about qualifying for Covid-related time off as she weakened.

"She was like, 'I need to get a positive test, I need to get a test,'" Mrs. Brigman said. "She never was focused on anything else."

Dr. Morris Brown III, who practices primary care nearby, said that financial worries often kept patients from seeking care in a state that has refused to expand Medicaid coverage for low-income people.

Even deciding to seek treatment, though, does not guarantee finding it. Dr. Toney Graham III, a South Carolina hospitalist, said that his orders for Paxlovid antiviral pills were rejected until he found the single rural pharmacy nearby that stocked it. Whatever Covid-related public education campaigns once existed have dried up, he said, leaving people in the dark about boosters and treatments.

"There's been a big drop-off in communication," Dr. Graham said.

Nonwhite people have generally faced the most severe disadvantages in surviving Covid at young and middle ages, partly because of differences in the burden of chronic illness and workplace risks.

A return to workplaces by white people may be helping to diminish the racial gap in infections across age groups, said Theresa Andrasfay, a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Southern California. But as long as nonwhite workers are in closer contact with customers and colleagues and can less afford to stay home sick, she said, workplace-related disparities will persist.

Black people have also kept masking at greater rates, [national polls indicate](#), a split that rural residents said was still on sharp display. "It's more the Black who wear their masks," said Roy Lee McKenzie, 78, of South Carolina, who is still recovering from a 2020 Covid case.

In rural areas, hospital closures, job losses, low vaccination rates and health problems stemming from poorer medical access have all exacerbated the effects of the pandemic. Inoculation rates were much lower in rural counties that voted more for Donald Trump, [research has shown](#), but also in rural areas with health worker shortages and with more Black residents.

Janice Probst, who studies rural health at the University of South Carolina, said that the state's strategy of funneling vaccines first through hospitals, and then through large chain pharmacies, had the effect of leaving behind more disadvantaged rural residents whose towns had neither.

In some places, though, even progress in vaccinating nonwhite communities has not been enough.

In Minnesota, Black, Hispanic and Asian adults under 65 were more highly vaccinated than white residents during the first Omicron wave, according to [research led by Elizabeth Wrigley-Field](#), an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota. But middle-aged nonwhite people were killed more often by Covid anyway. Black people suffered double the death rate of white people.

"The whole way that the pandemic is framed now from political leaders is very much that people can choose their level of risk," Dr. Wrigley-Field said. But, she said, "the risk that social groups have does not fall in lock step with their vaccination. It's decoupled from that because of all the other things in our society that put some people at more risk than others."

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HEADLINE	07/27 Military cell pivotal to move arms, ammo
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/27/us/politics/ukraine-weapons-center.html
GIST	STUTTGART, Germany — It takes a village to help Ukraine fight the Russians.

Consider a recent shipment of 105-millimeter howitzers. Britain donated the weapons, and New Zealand trained Ukrainian soldiers how to use them and provided spare parts. The United States supplied the ammunition and the vehicles to tow them and flew the load to a base near Ukraine's border.

Choreographing the sequence was the job of dozens of military logistics specialists ensconced in a large, secure attic room at the U.S. European Command headquarters in Germany. The little-known group is playing a pivotal role in keeping the Ukrainian military armed and equipped as its battlefield needs become more complicated.

Think of the cell as a cross between a wedding registry for bombs, bullets and rocket artillery, and a military version of FedEx. Uniformed officers from more than two dozen countries try to match Ukraine's requests with donations from more than 40 nations, then arrange to move the shipments by air, land or sea from the donor countries to Ukraine's border for pickup. All within about 72 hours.

"The flow has been nonstop," [Rear Adm. R. Duke Heinz](#), the European Command's chief logistician, told a small group of reporters who visited the logistics hub last week.

As the brutal five-month-old war appears to be edging closer to a new phase — with [Ukraine laying the groundwork for a major offensive in the country's south](#) — Ukrainian political leaders and commanders are pressing the United States and its other allies to accelerate and broaden the flow of arms and munitions.

"Ukraine needs the firepower and the ammunition to withstand its barrage and to strike back at the Russian weapons launching these attacks from inside Ukraine's own territory," [Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III said last week](#) in Washington. "And so we understand the urgency, and we're pushing hard to maintain and intensify the momentum of donations."

More American-supplied weapons like the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, are at the top of Ukraine's wish list. But so are armed drones and fighter jets. Gen. C.Q. Brown, the Air Force chief of staff, [suggested last week](#) that the United States or one of its European allies could send fighter jets to Ukraine in the coming weeks or months.

The United States recently said it would send [four more M142 HIMARS to Ukraine](#), adding to the dozen mobile rocket launchers already in the field. Ukrainian soldiers have used them to destroy dozens of Russian command posts, air defense sites and ammunition depots, Ukrainian and American officials say.

"This has significantly slowed down the Russian advance and dramatically decreased the intensity of their artillery shelling," Ukraine's defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, said in an [online interview last week for the Atlantic Council](#), a Washington research group. "So it's working."

Admiral Heinz said the cell was trying to meet Ukraine's demands for more weapons faster, and acknowledged that "if the roles were reversed, then the comments would be the same."

The weapons distribution nerve cell, formally called the International Donor Coordination Center, is where it happens. For such a high-profile mission, the room has a distinctly bare-bones feel. Officers sit at long folding tables, tapping on their laptops or conversing on phone headsets with colleagues in several different languages.

Like much of Europe that suffered through last week's heat wave, the attic room has no air-conditioning. Just a few open ceiling windows offered a faint breeze.

The center started its round-the-clock operations in March, combining British and American efforts to coordinate the flow of weapons and equipment. The process is straightforward. Ukraine submits requests through a secure, classified database. Military officers peruse the online list to determine what their countries can donate without jeopardizing their own national security. Nations also contribute training and

transportation. A Ukrainian three-star general working in the center answers questions and clarifies his country's priorities.

The center can send a technical team — a military version of the Geek Squad — to check the condition of a donor's potential contribution and help arrange the paperwork for its delivery. Once a match is approved, planners find the best way to deliver the shipment.

About 75 percent of the arms are sent to staging bases in Poland, where Ukrainian troops pick up their cargo and take it back across the border. Admiral Heinz declined to identify two other neighboring countries where shipments are delivered, citing security concerns by those nations. The planners use different border crossings into Ukraine for weapons and for humanitarian assistance, he said.

In nearly five months, the center has moved more than 78,000 tons of arms, munitions and equipment worth more than \$10 billion, U.S. and Western military officials said.

Many Baltic and Eastern European countries have donated [Soviet-standard weapons](#) and ammunition that the Ukrainian military has long used. But given the intense fighting, those stocks are running low, if not already depleted. One factory in Europe is making some Soviet-standard munitions, including howitzer shells, and it is operating 24/7, Admiral Heinz said. The shortage has required Ukraine to begin transitioning to Western-standard weapons and ammunition, which are more plentiful.

Once the weapons are in Ukraine, U.S. and other Western military officials say they are not able to track them. They rely on Ukraine's accounts of how and where the arms are used — although U.S. intelligence and military officials, including [Special Operations forces](#) — are in daily contact with their Ukrainian counterparts, U.S. officials said.

American and Ukrainian officials have downplayed reports that some weapons are being siphoned off on the black market in Ukraine, but Admiral Heinz acknowledged that “we are not serial-number tracking these once they go across the border.”

Russia has attacked Ukrainian train depots and warehouses but has not shown it can effectively strike moving targets — like weapons convoys — with its rapidly diminishing arsenal of precision-guided munitions, American officials said.

The initial shipments of weapons, including Stinger antiaircraft and Javelin antitank missiles, were flown into Poland and quickly shuttled across the border. But as larger, heavier and more complex weapons are donated, the military planners also send shipments by sea, rail and truck.

The center also arranges for Ukrainian soldiers to be trained on how to use and maintain the weapons, like the HIMARS, which requires at least two weeks of instruction, military officials said.

The United States has trained about 1,500 members of the Ukrainian military, largely in Germany. A group recently arrived in Britain to attend a new program that officials there say will ultimately train as many as 10,000 Ukrainian recruits in weaponry, patrol tactics, first aid and other skills.

When the Ukrainians run into a problem, “tele-repair” sites set up by the center can help keep equipment running and check the maintenance status of weapons.

Shifting to this all-inclusive program of equipping, training and sustaining the flow of weapons, and synchronizing the shipments with training, has posed growing challenges to the coordination center.

“It's definitely a more complex task,” said Brig. Christopher King, the top British officer in the center. “What I would say is they are very easy to train and very committed.”

The coordination center typically works on shipments two months out, Admiral Heinz said. In addition to the weapons and ammunition the Pentagon announced last week — the 16th round the Biden

	<p>administration has approved since August 2021 — Admiral Heinz said that two more shipments — No. 17 and No. 18 — are in the pipeline.</p> <p>The admiral did not provide details of the future shipments, which will require President Biden’s approval.</p> <p>For now, senior officials say the allies are standing firm behind Ukraine’s fight.</p> <p>“The goal is for Ukraine to win the right to defend the sovereignty of their country, and to regain that ground,” said Admiral Heinz, an Afghan and Iraq war veteran.</p> <p>“I can’t define what winning looks like for the Ukrainians,” he said, adding that was up to President Volodymyr Zelensky and the Ukrainian people. “The United States and our allies and partners are in it until he tells us he doesn’t need any more help.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Smugglers risk the lives illegal immigrants
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/27/hatchets-and-radios-smugglers-prepare-migrants-dan/
GIST	<p>Call them smugglers with a heart.</p> <p>When agents stopped a truck going through a Border Patrol highway checkpoint in Texas this month, they found 70 illegal immigrants in the semitrailer — and a walkie-talkie and two hatchets.</p> <p>The smugglers had placed the radio and hatchets there to help the migrants call for help and break out of the trailer should they run into trouble.</p> <p>It’s one response to the shocking case of migrants who became trapped in another trailer on a hot Texas day on June 27. Fifty-three of them ended up dead in what became the worst border tragedy in recent memory.</p> <p>The deaths reverberated across the smuggling community. Migrants themselves told Border Patrol agents that they heard about the tragedy and feared for their lives when they were loaded into trucks or car trunks to try to make their way from the border into the interior of the U.S.</p> <p>Few, however, appear to have been deterred from attempting the perilous journey. The hatchet-sharing smugglers also appear to be a rarity. Most smugglers go about their deadly business with little change.</p> <p>Just two days after the 53 deaths, agents nabbed another truck taking the same Texas route from Laredo to San Antonio on another 100-degree day. Nearly two dozen illegal immigrants were stuffed behind a false wall in the truck. One fell unconscious in the heat and had to be revived by emergency medical providers.</p> <p>All along the border, agents continue to find smugglers risking the lives of illegal immigrants.</p> <p>The United Nations reported in early July that the U.S.-Mexico border was the world’s most dangerous international boundary crossing in 2021. It is right on pace this year.</p> <p>The devastating death toll has spurred a search for blame. Immigrant rights groups say it belongs to the increasing get-tough approach to border security that the U.S. has been pursuing for decades.</p> <p>When the border was easy to cross, migrants would walk on their own through urban areas. Almost all were single adult men, and many would stay for an agricultural picking season and then head home, confident that they could make the trip again the next season.</p> <p>As the border hardened, migrants took to harsher crossings and increasingly turned to “coyotes,” the smugglers who facilitate the trip. The cartels took notice and began to assert control. All of it pushed the</p>

price of the journey higher and made migrants view the trip less as short-term work and more as a lifetime investment.

A typical Mexican coming through Laredo and headed to San Antonio — the route taken by the 53 doomed migrants — will pay about \$8,000 for the journey. Central Americans typically pay about \$10,000 per person, though some have reported to agents that they paid as much as \$19,000.

America's Voice, an immigrant rights group, says the U.S. must ease its laws or else the deaths will continue.

"We have long needed a new approach: to put smugglers and traffickers out of business, to expand legal channels for safe and orderly migration, to address and alleviate the root causes of forced migration, and to approach this through cooperation on a hemispheric basis rather than pretending these issues are mostly about our southern border," said Douglas Rivlin, communications director at America's Voice.

Border Patrol agents say the rising death toll is a matter of math: More people are coming, so many more are dying.

Rodney Scott, who served as chief of the Border Patrol at the end of the Trump administration and into the early months of the Biden administration, said President Biden's team dismantled what had been an effective strategy to discourage the punishing illegal crossings.

"The blood is definitely on the smugglers' hands, but in this case, there's also blood on this administration's hands," he said.

Two men have been charged in the 53 deaths. One was accused of being the smuggling organizer, and authorities said the other was the driver. They connected him to the truck by examining surveillance footage of the Border Patrol highway checkpoint on Interstate 35 between Laredo and San Antonio. They said they spotted the man in the driver's seat.

Those checkpoints are under renewed scrutiny in the wake of the tragedy.

Agents man dozens of checkpoints on highways across the Southwest, creating a kind of second border miles from the international boundary. Migrants must break through the checkpoints to go deeper into the U.S.

The checkpoints account for just 2% of Border Patrol arrests, according to an audit last month by the Government Accountability Office. Checkpoints are also responsible for most of the Border Patrol's seizures of heroin and methamphetamine, and they accounted for half of fentanyl seizures from 2016 to 2020.

Smugglers meticulously track checkpoint operations and wait for times when a contraband-sniffing dog isn't on duty or traffic is too heavy for agents to inspect vehicles.

It doesn't help that the administration has had to shift agents away from checkpoint duties to process illegal immigrants caught and released at the border, said Victor Manjarrez Jr., a longtime agent who now teaches at the University of Texas at El Paso.

"You may have a checkpoint open, but you don't have the staff you normally do. What the agent's doing at that point is waving people through because it becomes unsafe to do an inspection," Mr. Manjarrez said.

Authorities haven't revealed whether the doomed migrants were in the truck as it went through the Interstate 35 checkpoint or whether they were on foot walking around the checkpoint, to be picked up by the truck at a distance from the border. That is another common tactic of smugglers.

	<p>Mr. Manjarrez said that even given the workarounds and challenges, checkpoints are worth the effort. He said the only thing that will reduce the number of deaths is cutting the number of people.</p> <p>“You’ve got to be able to reduce the flow because once you’re able to reduce the flow, you’re able to look at things that stick out,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Army reboots, reorients to confront China
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/27/us-army-reboots-reorients-confront-china-back-alli/
GIST	<p>The U.S. Army is building up forces and international ties throughout the Indo-Pacific region to counter growing Chinese aggression and strengthen nervous regional allies, the commander of the U.S. Army Pacific said in an interview.</p> <p>Gen. Charles A. Flynn, in charge of more than 100,000 Army soldiers stationed from India to Alaska, said the vast region is not a theater that can be patrolled and defended solely by American air and naval forces.</p> <p>“A lot of people say it’s an air and maritime environment. No, it’s not. It’s a joint environment and requires joint solutions,” Gen. Flynn said in an exclusive talk with The Washington Times.</p> <p>A combat officer who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, Gen. Flynn has spent nearly a decade in Asia building close ties with fellow army leaders in the region, many of whom are now senior commanders, defense chiefs or civilian government leaders.</p> <p>Gen. Flynn is now the senior leader of a “theater army” spread throughout the Pacific and Indian oceans. He said the force plays a crucial role in keeping the peace with an increasingly confrontational China.</p> <p>“Essentially, [China’s] effort is to displace us regionally and achieve regional hegemony,” Gen. Flynn said. “That is their goal. They’ve got global aspirations beyond that. All of this is things that they’ve stated or written.”</p> <p>To counter the threat in the Pacific, Gen. Flynn said, his forces are concentrating on military training and alliances, specifically to operate with as many regional states’ armies as possible.</p> <p>“In my view, the great counterweight to what they are doing is our network of allies and partners,” he said. “I think the strength of what land power represents in the region is to bring that network of allies and partners more closely together so that we have a common view and shared understanding of how to counter any of those destabilizing activities that are happening in the region.”</p> <p>Army forces in the Indo-Pacific include the service’s formidable logistics and supply capabilities, which are needed to keep military forces operating cohesively in a conflict. In addition to 22,000 Army troops in South Korea, the Army’s Pacific command oversees 3,000 troops in Japan, 14,000 in Alaska and 28,000 in Hawaii, the location of the headquarters as part of the Indo-Pacific Command.</p> <p>Japan is a hub for Army prepositioned stockpiles, and the service handles Patriot and THAAD missile defense batteries.</p> <p>Army special operations forces under the general’s command also have vital roles in the U.S. security strategy in Asia.</p> <p>A ‘land guy’</p> <p>Gen. Flynn describes himself as “a land guy” regarding military matters because that is where “people live and nations exist.”</p>

In Indo-Pacific states, armies, rather than navy or air forces, make up 70% to 90% of the military forces. Working with allied land forces is crucial to keep the peace, he said, in part because the army is explicitly designed to defend what is at issue across the region.

“Armies are huge in that part of the world, and they’re important,” the general said. “Why? Because armies protect the national sovereignty of countries. What is under stress and duress are violations of national sovereignty.”

Gen. Flynn rejected criticism that the United States is an interloper in the Pacific. In addition to the strategic Hawaiian Islands, U.S. territory in the Pacific Rim includes Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Alaska and the West Coast.

The Army has set up training centers in the region for American and foreign troops. The centers allow militaries to practice in environments where they could face fighting, whether it is island-hopping in the tropical South Pacific or patrolling the frozen areas of Northeast Asia and South Asia.

Three centers are operating. One is in Hawaii for tropical island simulation, and another is in Alaska for cold weather training. A moveable training facility currently based in Indonesia will be the site of an international military exercise starting Monday. The U.S. and 13 regional armies, including soldiers from Japan for the first time, will take part in Garuda Shield. The training exercise, traditionally focused on the U.S. and Indonesia, will be “significantly larger in scope and scale” than in previous years, U.S. officials say.

The training centers “allow us to generate readiness in the region” and “prepare Army forces to operate closely with allies,” Gen. Flynn said.

Army military operations in the Indo-Pacific follow a force posture known as Operation Pathways to refine war techniques and tactics in the region with allies, especially long-range targeting across the vast space of the oceans.

Denying terrain

Gen. Flynn said another important element of the Army operating in forward areas is “really just denying key terrain in the region from some of the destabilizing activities that do go on and that are being conducted or committed by the Chinese.”

During remarks at the Aspen Security Forum last week, the general cited a Chinese push to increase control and influence over Pacific island nations and the tense, and at times violent, border dispute with India.

Gen. Flynn said he is “comfortable” with U.S.-Taiwanese army relations despite rising concern that China is moving closer to military action to reclaim what Beijing says is sovereign Chinese territory.

“We remain committed to providing Taiwan with the military means to defend itself in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act,” he said. “I would also like to highlight that our long-standing defense relationship with Taiwan remains aligned with the current threat posed by [China].”

The general noted: “I’m very comfortable with where they are right now, but, as [Defense] Secretary [Lloyd] Austin has said, we don’t want to see the status quo over Taiwan change unilaterally, certainly not through military action.”

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Taiwanese have announced a defense mobilization agency that Gen. Flynn said is “one indicator of recognition that something’s different” in cross-strait relations.

China has been stepping up military provocations with frequent warplane incursions into the Taiwanese air defense zone and large war games near the island. The Pentagon is working to bolster the island’s defenses

with more asymmetric warfare capabilities that would allow the smaller, weaker Taiwanese military to better hold off the Chinese military.

U.S. Army relations with Japan's military are exceptionally close, Gen. Flynn said, with frequent training and exercises. The Japan Self-Defense Forces also may train in Alaska to prepare for a defense of its northern Hokkaido Island.

The general said he speaks regularly with Japanese Gen. Yoshihide Yoshida, chief of the staff for the Ground Self-Defense Forces. Gen. Yoshida just returned from Europe. He will hold talks with Gen. Flynn and Australian military leaders next month in Australia as part of a "senior leaders' seminar."

Gen. Flynn said the Army has transformed its posture in the Indo-Pacific by creating the 11th Airborne Division in Alaska and setting up the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center to provide Arctic, jungle and archipelago training.

Next year, the Army will add one of its 132 watercraft systems to Japan. The systems move combat forces, equipment and supplies.

The Army also added its first multidomain task force to the Indo-Pacific. The task force, according to the Army, is a fighting force specifically designed to "synchronize precision effects and precision fires in all domains" against "anti-access and area-denial forces." The term is used to describe China's military in the region.

A second task force is planned for the Pacific.

"I'm pretty excited about the things that we're doing out there right now. That's a lot. Those are all new," Gen. Flynn said.

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HEADLINE	0727 Wall Street closes higher
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/jul/27/wall-street-closes-higher-after-new-fed-rate-hike/
GIST	<p>Technology companies led a broad rally for stocks on Wall Street Wednesday as investors welcomed another interest rate hike by the Federal Reserve as sign the central bank is ratcheting up its campaign to fight surging inflation.</p> <p>In a widely expected move, the central bank raised its key interest rate by three-quarters of a point, lifting the rate to the highest level since 2018.</p> <p>At a news conference, Chair Jerome Powell suggested the Fed's rate hikes have already had some success in slowing the economy and possibly easing inflationary pressures. Some on Wall Street saw that as a signal the Fed may not have to raise rates as aggressively in coming months, triggering a rally in the final hour of regular trading.</p> <p>The S&P 500 climbed 2.6% and the tech-heavy Nasdaq surged 4.1%, its biggest gain in over two years. The Dow Jones Industrial Average rose 1.4%. Smaller company stocks also gained, lifting the Russell 2000 2.4% higher.</p> <p>Bond yields turned broadly lower following the Fed's announcement. The two-year Treasury yield, which tends to move with expectations for the Fed, fell to 2.98% from 3.06% late Tuesday. The 10-year yield, which influences mortgage rates, fell to 2.77% from 2.79%.</p> <p>Rate increases like Wednesday's, the fourth so far this year, make borrowing more expensive and slow the economy. The hope is that the Fed and other central banks can deftly find the middle ground where the economy slows enough to whip inflation but not enough to cause a recession.</p>

“The Fed raised rates by the expected 75 basis points but recognized that the economy is softening while the job market remains strong,” said Jay Hatfield, CEO of Infrastructure Capital Advisors. “The statement is slightly dovish and is bolstering the tech-led stock rally that started this morning.”

Some Wall Street analysts were less optimistic that the Fed may opt for more moderate rate hikes from here, especially since inflation has accelerated to 9.1%, the fastest annual pace in 41 years.

Charlie Ripley, senior investment strategist at Allianz Investment Management, called the hike “warranted.”

“That being said, recent economic data is now introducing a higher degree of uncertainty around the path of policy as we move forward from here,” Ripley said.

In a note Wednesday, analysts at Citi said that while Powell mentioned that a slowdown in hikes would be appropriate at some point, exactly when that might be remains undetermined, adding that they “would not view this as a particularly dovish comment.”

“We continue to expect core inflation to push the Fed to hike more aggressively than they or markets anticipate,” the analysts wrote, noting they expect the Fed will announce another three-quarter point increase at its September policy meeting, with further rate hikes continuing into early 2023.

The S&P 500 rose 102.56 points to 4,023.61. The Dow gained 436.05 points to close at 32,197.59. The Nasdaq rose 469.85 points to 12,032.42, and the Russell 2000 picked up 43.09 points to end at 1,848.34. The indexes are now all on pace for a weekly gain, extending Wall Street’s strong July rally. The S&P 500 is up 5.3% so far this month.

It’s not uncommon for stocks to rally when the Fed issues a new interest rate policy statement, only to sell-off the next day.

Stocks have been choppy this week following solid gains last week that were mainly fueled by better-than-expected reports on corporate profits.

Inflation remains at the forefront of investors’ minds, however. Markets were spooked Monday after retail giant Walmart warned that its profits are being hurt by rising prices for food and gas, which are forcing shoppers to cut back on more profitable discretionary items such as clothing.

The retailer’s profit warning in the middle of the quarter was rare and raised worries about how the highest inflation in 40 years is affecting the entire retail sector.

Meanwhile, some parts of the economy are already slowing because as the Fed has raised rates, particularly the housing industry. Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes slowed in June for the fifth month in a row as mortgage rates have climbed sharply this year. Expectations of higher overall rates has pushed up the 10-year Treasury yield, which influences rates on home loans.

Investors kept an eye on the latest batch of corporate earnings reports Wednesday, including strong earnings from Google’s owner Alphabet and Microsoft.

Shares in Microsoft and Google parent Alphabet rose 6.7% and 7.7%, respectively, after their latest quarterly reports. Boeing shares rose 0.1% after the aerospace company reported it delivered more planes in the first quarter than it has since the start of the pandemic.

Technology and communication services stocks accounted for a big share of the S&P 500’s gains. Nvidia rose 7.6% and Netflix added 6%.

	<p>Retailers, restaurant chains and other companies that rely on direct consumer spending also helped lift the market. Chipotle Mexican Grill jumped 14.7% after the restaurant chain reported second-quarter earnings that beat analysts' forecasts.</p> <p>Spotify Technology vaulted 12.2% after the music streaming service reported monthly active user and premium subscriber numbers that exceeded the Street's expectations.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Fears: more long Covid amid variant spread
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/fears-of-more-long-covid-a-mass-disabling-event-as-variants-rip-through-nation/
GIST	<p><i>Los Angeles Times</i> - LOS ANGELES — As highly infectious omicron subvariants continue to fuel a new coronavirus wave, there is growing concern about long COVID, in which symptoms or increased risk of illness can persist for months or even years.</p> <p>Efforts to understand the scale of long COVID's effects have taken on additional urgency given the number of people who have come down with the virus since omicron was first detected in California shortly after Thanksgiving. Some experts think this latest surge may exceed the record-high case counts seen over the fall and winter, leaving more people at risk of developing the condition.</p> <p>"Because of the sheer volume of people that were infected, we can expect to see more long COVID cases," said Dr. Anne Foster, vice president and chief clinical strategy officer for the University of California Health system.</p> <p>For these long-haul sufferers, maladies such as a cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, heart palpitations and brain fog have marred their lives and sometimes made it impossible to work. The most enduring cases can trace their initial coronavirus infection as far back as 2020, from the beginning of the pandemic.</p> <p>Vaccinations and boosters may help reduce the risk of long COVID, but at least one study suggests the protective effect could be relatively limited. That's why, officials and experts say, it remains important to take reasonable steps to avoid infection.</p> <p>It's hard to predict the prevalence of long COVID, given the lack of a uniform definition, its sweeping array of symptoms and no easy way to test for it. Different studies have placed the percentage of people reporting symptoms for 12 weeks after an initial infection at anywhere from 3% to 50%.</p> <p>But there is agreement among a number of experts that its consequences can be significant, including an increase in the risk of death or problems with other organ systems — including the heart — long after an acute infection has cleared.</p> <p>An estimated 1 in 13 adults nationwide, and 1 in 14 in California, had current long COVID symptoms in early July, according to data collected by the Census Bureau and analyzed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The condition in that study was defined as someone having symptoms lasting three months or longer that weren't experienced prior to infection.</p> <p>About 1 in 7 adults across the U.S., and 1 in 8 in California, reported ever having long COVID symptoms, the data showed. As of early June, adults in their 50s were three times as likely to report long COVID than those 80 or older.</p> <p>Long COVID has resulted in a "mass disabling event," Foster said.</p> <p>"The good news is that most long COVID will resolve, let's say, after a year. ... But there's going to be some smaller subset that will have lifelong disability and impact to their health," Foster added.</p>

Among those is Hannah Davis, a co-founder of the Patient-Led Research Collaborative that focuses on long COVID.

Davis got COVID-19 in March 2020 and to this day has “difficulty driving, reading and walking, and I still have not recovered,” she told the U.S. House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis during a recent hearing.

“Long COVID must be considered in every step of the COVID response,” she said. “It has already impacted our workforce. Many people with long COVID can’t work or need reduced hours and struggle to apply for disability benefits. The financial impact is devastating and cannot be overstated.”

The condition, she added, will “disable a huge percentage of our society if we do not decrease new cases and prioritize a cure for existing ones.”

A report published by the CDC in May estimated that 1 in 5 adults ages 18 to 64 who had COVID-19 suffered a health condition that might be related to the previous coronavirus infection. Problems can affect the lungs, heart, brain, kidneys, muscles and bones.

“The more severe the acute infection, the more likely the risk of long COVID,” said Dr. Steven Deeks, a professor of medicine at UC San Francisco and principal investigator of the Long-term Impact of Infection with Novel Coronavirus, or LIINC, study. “But it’s not absolute, and people who are not particularly symptomatic — and people who were even asymptomatic — can go on to develop long COVID, no question about it.”

Researchers are still trying to understand the cause of long COVID symptoms. Theories include that the coronavirus might cause tissue destruction during an acute infection, leading to longer-lasting illness; that the virus persists in the body even after someone is no longer infectious; that the virus revs up the body’s immune response, causing harmful inflammation; that infection triggers the development of antibodies that attack a person’s tissues; or that infection leads to blood-clotting issues.

“It’s such a diverse condition that there probably are multiple different processes or causes for some of the different types of symptoms rather than one unifying disease process,” said Dr. Lucy Horton, an infectious disease specialist at UC San Diego Health.

With the ability of the coronavirus — officially called SARS-CoV-2 — to get into the bloodstream, it’s thought that infection can provoke more inflammation, which can lead to further disease elsewhere in the body, said Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, a clinical epidemiologist at Washington University in St. Louis and chief of research and development at the Veterans Affairs St. Louis Healthcare System.

“The common thread here is that long COVID is real,” Al-Aly said. “People are getting diabetes and heart disease and kidney disease and ... it’s certainly the result of SARS-CoV-2,” which can interact with other cells and lead to organ dysfunction.

Some factors that put patients at higher risk of long COVID include being overweight, high blood pressure or heart disease, said Dr. Nisha Viswanathan, director of the UCLA Health Long COVID Program. Women also appear to be at a relatively higher risk.

Often, underlying medical issues can become uncontrolled after a COVID-19 infection. But even those with no health problems still have some risk.

“There are many patients with long COVID who are young and had no preexisting health conditions prior to being infected with COVID,” Horton said. “We know that children can develop long COVID. So I think anyone who says COVID only affects old, unhealthy people is just ignoring the truth, to be honest.”

At UCLA, Viswanathan has an entire group of long COVID patients in their 20s who have no prior history of medical conditions and who “weren’t terribly unwell when they had COVID, either.”

Surprisingly, some now struggling most with fatigue are marathon runners, cyclists and others who, before they were initially infected, “did quite a bit of cardio exercise,” Viswanathan said.

Vaccinations and boosters are believed to be helpful at staving off long COVID, but there is no consensus on the degree to which they provide protection.

One report observing triple-vaccinated Italian health care workers who weren’t hospitalized for COVID-19 found that two or three doses of vaccine was associated with a lower prevalence of long COVID.

Another study, which Al-Aly co-authored and involved on U.S. veterans, found that being vaccinated brought only a 15% reduction in the odds of developing long COVID compared with unvaccinated people.

Other long COVID symptoms include worsening depression, anxiety and neuropathy, which causes pain in various parts of the body, according to Viswanathan. Patients can have isolated symptoms or a combination of any, and treatment plans need to be tailored accordingly, she said.

Symptoms also can include loss of smell or hair, ejaculation difficulty and reduced libido, according to a report published Monday in the journal Nature Medicine.

Some patients with professional degrees who had previously been high functioning are now “struggling to work,” Viswanathan said. “We’re talking about patients, who because of the brain fog, because of the fatigue, they either have really substantially decreased their work hours, or they’re completely on disability at this point.”

She said most of her patients see some degree of improvement in symptoms, with some more dramatic than others. But it takes work to develop a plan — “there’s no FDA-approved therapy for long COVID at this point,” so treatment ideas include using what’s known about other medical conditions.

For instance, those with persistent shortness of breath might undergo pulmonary rehabilitation, which is typically used for patients with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. In some instances, physical therapy and acupuncture have helped patients with muscle pain.

And some have seen improvements by going on an anti-inflammatory diet — with lower portions of refined carbohydrates and red meat — which is otherwise suggested to reduce the risk of heart attacks and heart disease.

Sometimes, improving sleep quality helps. “For some patients, it’s literally a matter of they just need to take time off for work ... time to rest,” Viswanathan said, which gives “the opportunity for their body to probably start focusing on healing itself.”

In some cases, antidepressants (even when given to those who do not suffer from depression) can help clear brain fog, Viswanathan said, suggesting the condition may be caused by a hormonal imbalance in the brain. Other times, patients must learn how to live with brain fog, such as making lists, pacing themselves and letting others know of plans.

Some studies have shown how the coronavirus “is effectively attacking your frontal part of your brain,” Viswanathan said, and there have been autopsies of COVID-19 patients showing brain damage.

“The thing with long COVID is we have no way of knowing what is now going to happen going forward. Will [our patients’] brains heal with time? Will they not?” Viswanathan asked.

There are other viral illnesses that produce a post-viral fatigue syndrome, such as infectious mononucleosis, often referred to as mono, which is more commonly caused by the Epstein-Barr virus. Most people usually feel better within weeks, but occasionally fatigue can persist for six months or a year.

	<p>While there are a number of different risk factors, the only surefire way to dodge long COVID is to avoid getting infected with the coronavirus.</p> <p>“Even though I think many people are kind of under a delusion that the pandemic is over, it’s not,” Horton said. “So I think it’s a good time to kind of go back to our basics that have protected us: masking when in crowded indoor settings, using rapid testing before visiting older vulnerable people or groups,” and staying up to date on vaccinations.</p> <p>Although it can be disconcerting that so many questions about long COVID remain, the uncertainty is not new as the virus and the science behind it have continued to evolve throughout the pandemic.</p> <p>“Every time we think we’ve got this virus figured out, it basically laughs at us,” Deeks said. “It moves on, it changes, and then we have new riddles to try and figure out. And that’s the story of COVID for the last two-and-a-half years. As they say: The virus is not done with us yet.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Vancouver clears homeless camps; fire risk
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/vancouver-clears-homeless-camps-wildfire-risk/283-3d7c9d44-4a6b-4b31-a926-32a8bb722676
GIST	<p>VANCOUVER, Wash. — The City of Vancouver has begun cleaning up homeless camps and ordering residents to move out in areas that are considered at risk for wildfires. It's the first round of enforcement under a new city ordinance aimed at ending homeless camping in public places that could quickly burn.</p> <p>"This is quite dangerous during fire season," said Jamie Spinelli, Vancouver's homeless response coordinator. "It's very dangerous if someone gets caught in a wildfire and then fire trucks can't get here there's no water access."</p> <p>Starting early Wednesday morning to beat the heat, cleanup crews began work just outside Leverich Park, with a camp cleanup on the hillside near the entrance. They then worked their way into the park and onto the Burnt Bridge Creek Trail.</p> <p>There was plenty to clean up, but most of the homeless camps in the area were already empty of people, including one camp just off the beaten path. It burned earlier in the season, but fortunately the fire didn't spread.</p> <p>"This is an area that's been burned out, and so we're going to go ahead and get rid of all the debris that was left behind," said Sheila Andrews, encampment response coordinator for Vancouver.</p> <p>Homeless residents from this camp and others got regular visits from Andrews over the past few months to help them prepare for this day.</p> <p>"So they've known for some time," she said. "I bring out Council for the Homeless, I bring out every other outreach organization I can, to meet with everybody to get their needs met to move forward."</p> <p>With many of the roughly 35 former campers from this area now in better situations, a contracted cleanup crew from Rapid Response Bio-Clean came in and helped city workers reclaim the land along the popular greenway.</p> <p>The new city ordinance to block camping is meant to stop situations like a fire that broke out at a large homeless encampment just north of city limits a month ago. The fire injured one person and Clark County Fire District 6 had a challenge stopping it from spreading into the surrounding brush and trees.</p> <p>Back near Leverich Park, a lone Vancouver police officer helped out in what proved to be a low security risk cleanup. Spinelli said the clean up will make the public space better for everybody.</p>

	"We've done everything that we can to make sure people have alternatives, but the reality is this place is just ripe for a wildfire and you know, people trying to stay warm at night or just cook their food will use fire," Spinelli said. "And sometimes that gets out of control, especially in dry environments like this."
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HEADLINE	07/27 Kittitas Co. prepares for higher fire danger
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/high-fire-danger-washington-heatwave-continues/281-ee71b008-52f1-4b84-ae01-f5f0e56c4dfa
GIST	<p>KITTITAS COUNTY, Wash. — Kittitas Valley Fire and Rescue (KVFR) said it's on high alert heading into the weekend, as high temperatures converge with lush fuel that will dry out and lead to faster-spreading fires. It's cautioning residents to follow open-burning bans and asking recreators to enjoy the areas safely.</p> <p>"It's an awareness and an appeal to have them be part of the solution in preventing fires in the first place, and to have them ready to leave the area when that's appropriate and hopefully prior to fire season over the previous year they've done things to protect themselves from fire danger," KVFR Deputy Chief Rich Elliott said.</p> <p>Homeowner Sherry Kain said her family chose to live in the area because of the canyon's beauty and its proximity to creeks, but they're aware of the risks and are careful each season.</p> <p>"We try to keep vegetation away from the perimeter of the home; it's kind of hard cause you always want to have, say, roses on your house, but keeping that out of the way and keeping the sprinklers going as much as we can," Kain said. "There's always the fire danger in this area- it just is- so we're always aware of where they're located and we always have friends in the area, community we can work with."</p> <p>The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) said heat has ramped up fuel for fires pretty quickly over the past week, going from below normal to drier than normal, with higher than normal fire danger.</p> <p>KVFR and other agencies work closely together on fires and are prepared for a busy season ahead according to deputy chief Elliott. In recent years, he said they've changed techniques and employed more full-scale responses immediately when a fire starts, in hopes of keeping them to smaller acreage. They've also increased communication to underscore the importance of evacuation.</p> <p>"The psychology and the emotions attached to people and their property create risk," Deputy Chief Elliott said. "And they create risk to us. So we try to keep them out of their areas, and we try to make sure people leave those areas early so we can just deal with the fire."</p> <p>They encourage people to sign up for emergency alerts, so they know when and where a fire has started.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 WA, ID top states for fastest homes sales
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/washington-idaho-top-list-states-where-homes-sell-fastest-report-says/Z5AD2FDVSZCLJEWCPUFNZFG4/
GIST	<p>Looking to put your home up for sale and get it sold quickly?</p> <p>According to a study by Tangerine, an online bank, Idaho and Washington top the list of states where homes are selling the fastest.</p> <p>The bank said it analyzed data from Zillow that included the average "days to pending," which refers to how long it takes to get an offer on a home. The data also included "days to close," which refers to how long it takes to close a sale.</p>

	<p>While Idaho topped the list with sales taking 67.31 days on average, Washington state came in second with an average 69.11 days to complete a sale, indicating that homes are receiving offers fast.</p> <p>According to the report, homes in Washington are taking an average of 32 days to receive an offer and 36 days for them to close.</p> <p>The city where homes are reportedly selling the fastest in Washington state is Bellingham, with sales being completed in 65.24 days on average.</p> <p>Other states where homes are selling quickly include Indiana, the District of Colombia and Kansas, which make up the remaining top five.</p> <p>States that are taking the longest to sell homes include New York, Hawaii and New Jersey, according to the report.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Kitsap Co. first monkeypox case
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/kitsap-county-officials-identify-first-monkeypox-case-in-area
GIST	<p>PORT ORCHARD, Wash. — Kitsap County health officials have identified their first probable monkeypox case.</p> <p>The Kitsap County resident is a man who tested positive this week for Orthopoxvirus, a group of viruses causing monkeypox.</p> <p>The CDC is following up with another test to confirm the case, health officials say they are working to identify close contacts.</p> <p>There have been more than 100 cases identified in Washington state since May, with most in King County.</p> <p>"The first case of monkeypox in Kitsap is cause for awareness but not alarm," Kitsap Public Health District Health Officer Dr. Gib Morrow said. "We are asking residents to be aware of how monkeypox spreads and contact a healthcare provider if they experience symptoms."</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 WSDOT: 382,000lbs roadside litter in June
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/191-tons-of-roadside-litter-picked-up-by-washington-dot
GIST	<p>The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) said it picked up 191 tons of litter along roads last month-- that's equivalent to 382,000 pounds of trash.</p> <p>With help from the Ecology Youth Corps, the Department of Corrections and Adopt-a-Highway volunteers, WSDOT maintenance teams continue to tackle the ongoing problem of roadside litter throughout the state.</p> <p>That brings the total to approximately 459 tons of litter picked up by WSDOT so far this year, or 918,000 pounds. Of that amount, about 20% was large debris such as furniture, tires and dead animals. Another 20% was litter in or near homeless encampments.</p> <p>WSDOT spends more than \$3 million annually to pick up and dispose of litter across the state. The Washington State Patrol also issues fines to people who litter.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Scorching Northwest heatwave last longer
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Records-fall-as-Northwest-swelters-under-multiday-17331356.php

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The scorching heat spell in the Pacific Northwest is now expected to last longer than forecasters had initially predicted, setting parts of the normally temperate region on course to break heat wave duration records.

“We warmed up the forecast for the latter part of this week,” said David Bishop, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Portland, Oregon. His office is now forecasting up to 101 degrees Fahrenheit (38.3 Celsius) for Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Portland already hit 102 F (38.9 C) on Tuesday, a new record daily high, prompting the National Weather Service to extend the excessive heat warning for the city from Thursday through Saturday evening.

Seattle on Tuesday also reported a new record daily high of 94 F (34.4 C).

The duration of the heat wave puts Oregon’s biggest city on course to tie its longest streak of six consecutive days of 95 F (35 C) or higher.

Climate change is fueling longer heat waves in the Pacific Northwest, a region where weeklong heat spells were historically rare, according to climate experts.

Heat-related 911 calls in Portland have tripled in recent days, from an estimated eight calls on Sunday to 28 calls on Tuesday, said Dan Douthit, a spokesperson for the city’s Bureau of Emergency Management. Most calls involved a medical response, Douthit added.

Multnomah County, which includes Portland, said there has been an uptick in the number of people visiting emergency departments for heat-related symptoms.

Emergency department visits “have remained elevated since Sunday,” the county said in a statement. “In the past three days, hospitals have treated 13 people for heat illness, when they would normally expect to see two or three.”

People working or exercising outside, along with older people, were among those taken to emergency departments, the statement added.

On Wednesday, the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office said at least two people have died from suspected hyperthermia during the heat wave. One death occurred in Portland on Monday, the Multnomah County Medical Examiner’s Office said.

The state medical examiner’s office said the heat-related death designation is preliminary and could change after further investigation. The official cause of death may not be confirmed until several months later.

People in Portland’s iconic food cart industry are among those who work outside. Many food trucks have shut down as sidewalks sizzle.

Rico Loverde, the chef and owner of the food cart Monster Smash Burgers, said the temperature inside his cart is generally 20 degrees hotter than the outdoor temperature, making it 120 F (48.9 C) inside his business this week.

Loverde said he closes down if it reaches above 95 F (35 C) because his refrigerators overheat and shut down. Last week, even with slightly cooler temperatures in the mid-90s, Loverde got heat stroke from working in his cart for hours, he said.

“It hurts, it definitely hurts. I still pay my employees when we’re closed like this because they have to pay the bills too, but for a small business it’s not good,” he said Tuesday.

Multnomah County said its four emergency overnight cooling shelters were at half capacity on Tuesday with 130 people spending the night. But anticipating more demand, officials have decided to expand capacity at the four sites to accommodate nearly 300 people. The overnight shelters will remain open at least through Friday morning.

William Nonluecha, who lives in a tent in Portland, sought out shade with some friends as the temperature soared on Wednesday afternoon. Nonluecha was less than a minute's walk from a cooling shelter set up by local authorities but wasn't aware it was open. He said the heat in his tent was almost unbearable.

His friend Mel Taylor, who was homeless last year but now has transitional housing, said during last summer's record-breaking heat wave a man in a tent near his died from heat exhaustion and no one realized it. He's afraid the same thing might happen this summer.

"He was in his tent for like a week and the smell, that's how they figured out that he was dead," Taylor said. "It's sad."

Residents and officials in the Northwest have been trying to adjust to the likely reality of longer, hotter heat waves following last summer's deadly "heat dome" weather phenomenon that prompted record temperatures and deaths.

About 800 people died in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia during a 2021 heat wave that hit in late June and early July. The temperature at the time soared to an all-time high of 116 F (46.7 C) in Portland and smashed heat records in cities and towns across the region. Many of those who died were older and lived alone.

Other regions of the U.S. often experience temperatures of 100 degrees. But in regions like the Pacific Northwest, people are not as acclimated to the heat and are more susceptible to it, said Craig Crandall, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

"There's a much greater risk for individuals in areas such as the Northwest to have higher instances of heat-related injuries and death," Crandall said.

Crandall said people who are continually exposed to heat have certain bodily adaptations allowing them to cool off more efficiently. A main acclimation response is an increase in the amount of sweat released from sweat glands.

"The combination of lack of air conditioning and not being exposed to the heat and not having those adaptations" can put people in the Northwest more at risk during heat waves compared to warmer parts of the country, he said.

Portland officials have opened cooling centers in public buildings and installed misting stations in parks. TriMet, which operates public transportation in the Portland metro area, is offering free rides to cooling centers for passengers who cannot afford to pay.

Officials in Seattle and Portland on Tuesday issued air quality advisories expected to last through Saturday.

Further south, the National Weather Service issued a heat advisory on Wednesday for western Nevada and northeast California that is set to last from the late Thursday morning until Saturday night. Across the region, near record daytime high temperatures will range from 99 to 104 degrees F (37.22 to 40 C).

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HEADLINE	07/27 NKorea: 'ready to fight US'; eliminate South
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/kim-jong-un-says-hes-ready-to-fight-us-eliminate-south-korea/

GIST	<p><i>Bloomberg News</i> - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un threatened to “eliminate” South Korea and said he was ready for any battle with the U.S. in a speech to mark the 69th anniversary of the deal that ended fighting in the Korean War.</p> <p>Kim, making his first appearance in public in nearly three weeks, delivered one of his strongest rhetorical attacks against South Korea since conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol took office in May and pledged to take a tough line toward Pyongyang.</p> <p>The North Korean leader said that “U.S. imperialists are pushing the South Korean authorities into a suicidal confrontation” with his nation, the state’s official Korean Central News Agency reported Thursday.</p> <p>“The South Korean regime and its military thugs are devising tactics to confront us militarily,” Kim said. “Such a dangerous attempt will be immediately punished by our powerful force, and the Yun Suk Yeol regime and his army will be eliminated.”</p> <p>Kim has been stepping up his provocations this year while U.S. attention has been diverted toward Russia’s invasion of Ukraine by firing off a record number of ballistic missiles and showing signs it could conduct its first nuclear test since 2017. The fiery speech serves as a reminder to President Joe Biden of the pressing security problems posed by Pyongyang.</p> <p>The speech marked the July 27 signing of the armistice agreement among U.S.-led United Nations forces, North Korea and China that brought a cease-fire to the 1950-1953 Korean War. Even though it ended in a stalemate, North Korea celebrates the day as a “Victory in the Fatherland.”</p> <p>The U.S. push to isolate Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, coupled with increasing animosity toward China, has allowed Kim to strengthen his nuclear deterrent without fear of facing more sanctions at the U.N. Security Council.</p> <p>There’s almost no chance Russia or China, which have veto power at the council, would support any measures against North Korea, as they did in 2017 following a series of weapons tests that prompted former President Donald Trump to warn of “fire and fury.”</p> <p>Kim often drops out of the public eye in the summer for stays at his coastal mansion and megayacht. But any prolonged absence raises questions about the health of the 38-year-old, whose longest time out of without a public appearance as leader was six weeks in 2014. His last appearance in state media came on July 9 when he appeared at a photo session with ruling party cadres.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Large fire Federal Way apartment complex
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/large-fire-in-federal-way-apartment-complex-displaces-20-people/
GIST	<p>At least 20 people were displaced from their homes Wednesday after a large fire engulfed an apartment complex on the 35200 block of 21st Avenue Southwest in Federal Way, authorities said.</p> <p>Fire crews responded to the three-alarm fire shortly before 5 p.m. and worked to make sure everyone evacuated the building, South King Fire and Rescue said.</p> <p>Firefighters rescued a person from the top story of the building where the roof has collapsed, the agency said.</p> <p>Another individual was also rescued through the use of a ground ladder, said South King Fire and Rescue spokesperson Brad Chaney.</p> <p>City officials opened the community center in partnership with the Red Cross to provide temporary shelter to people, the agency said.</p>

	<p>One person sustained minor injuries, Chaney said. A firefighter who suffered heat exhaustion was treated at a local hospital and was later discharged, he added.</p> <p>Though the fire was mostly contained around 8 p.m., investigation efforts won't begin until Thursday at the earliest due to structural safety concerns, South King Fire and Rescue said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Heat advisory remain in effect rest of week
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/environment/wednesday-was-a-brief-cooldown-in-seattles-weeklong-heat-wave/
GIST	<p>Residents of the Puget Sound region got a brief cooldown — if you could call it that — on Wednesday. But that was likely little consolation for those working outside or sweltering inside without air conditioning, as the high temperature stayed in the low 90s.</p> <p>The National Weather Service's heat advisory will remain in effect through Saturday for Seattle and the rest of the Pacific Northwest. And it's not just you thinking that your weather app keeps adding days to the heat wave and pushing predicted highs even higher.</p> <p>"You are not imagining that," said Carly Kovacik of the National Weather Service in Seattle on Wednesday. "It keeps getting prolonged by one extra day. Saturday now looks quite a bit warmer than the previous forecast."</p> <p>Tuesday's high in Seattle broke a daily record, with 94 degrees recorded around 5 p.m. at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. The previous record high on that date was 92, set four years ago. Wednesday was slightly cooler than Tuesday, and by cooler that means only around 91, because of some midlevel clouds from the south. Still, in the U.S.'s least air-conditioned metro area, we'll take it.</p> <p>An area of low pressure offshore was supposed to push an area of high pressure, which is over us right now, to the east. That low-pressure area is coming more slowly than expected, Kovacik said.</p> <p>Across King County medical centers, there were 13 emergency department visits and fewer than 10 EMS responses on Tuesday for heat-related illness, according to Public Health – Seattle & King County, which provides daily data. There were no heat-related deaths or drownings reported, though additional heat-related deaths could be confirmed later. During last year's heat wave, with record-breaking temperatures, there were 275 heat-related visits to emergency departments in one day, accounting for 11% of all visits in a single day, the health department said.</p> <p>At Seattle's UW Medical Center-Montlake, one person with a heat-related complaint was treated Tuesday, according to spokesperson Brian Donohue. Dr. Steve Mitchell, director of Harborview Medical Center's emergency department, said in a news release that his biggest concern is cumulative symptoms that emerge during the third or fourth day of a heat wave.</p> <p>Swedish Health Services' emergency departments haven't seen an uptick in heat-related visits, but are "ready and prepared" for an increase in cases, Swedish spokesperson Natalie Kozimor said.</p> <p>An ozone alert issued by the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency remains in effect for east Issaquah, North Bend, Enumclaw and other areas of the Cascade foothills in King and Pierce counties.</p> <p>Ozone, or smog, levels will become unhealthy for sensitive groups in the afternoon every day this week because of the heat, according to the agency. Those considered to be at higher risk include infants, children, people over 65, and those who are pregnant or have heart or lung diseases, respiratory infections or diabetes. Stroke patients and people with COVID-19 infections are also considered sensitive to high ozone levels.</p>

	<p>Sensitive groups should minimize time outdoors from 1-7 p.m., and while indoors, close windows and use an air conditioner in recirculation mode. The agency recommends going to a public place, such as a mall, library or community center, if there isn't an air conditioner at home.</p> <p>As residents flocked to beaches, swimming pools and splash parks, Kirkland's popular Juanita Beach was closed because high levels of bacteria were found Monday by the King County Water and Land Resources Division. People and pets should avoid the water until the beach reopens, which will be next week at the earliest.</p> <p>Kirkland lifeguards will be at the beach, which also has signs about the closure.</p> <p>Swimming beaches at East Green Lake Beach in Seattle, Gene Coulon Memorial Beach Park in Renton and Meydenbauer Bay Park in Bellevue are also closed for health reasons.</p> <p>By Sunday, the weather will still be warm by Seattle standards, but with a predicted high in the mid-80s instead of the 90s. And by next week, we'll be back to the upper 70s, with a potential for showers.</p> <p>"It'll be a noticeable change," Kovacik said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Rise in Seattle's 90-degree days
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/the-rise-in-seattles-90-degree-days-charted-all-the-way-back-to-1945/
GIST	<p>When I moved to Seattle 20 years ago, I remember everybody saying the same thing about air conditioning: "Why bother? It only gets really hot a couple times a year."</p> <p>That perception, I would say, no longer exists. Very hot days seem a lot more common, and people often chalk it up to climate change. But does the data bear this out?</p> <p>I looked at the National Weather Service data for the number of days each year when the high temperature at Sea-Tac hit 90 degrees or higher, going back to 1945 when the record-keeping began.</p> <p>And the answer is yes. Recent years have had an unusually high number of very hot days.</p> <p>In total, there were 246 90-plus-degree days in Seattle from 1945 through June 2022. One hundred of those days have occurred in the past 20 years.</p> <p>Since 1945, there were only nine years when we've had seven or more 90-plus-degree days in Seattle, and five of those nine years have been since 2015.</p> <p>In fact, 2015 had the most days, clocking in at 12, on record, when the thermometer spiked into the 90s or 100s. The year with the second-most such days was 2018, at 11. Both 2021 and 2017 had eight, and in 2016, there were seven.</p> <p>2021, of course, included that record-breaking 108-degree day on June 28.</p> <p>Since 2015, the only years that were more like "normal" for Seattle were 2020, with four very hot days, and 2019, with only two.</p> <p>We are in a heat wave now, so we'll see how many we rack up for 2022, but it seems like a safe bet to say there will be more than seven once again.</p> <p>If you're among the tens of thousands who moved to the Seattle area in the past decade, you won't recall a single summer without a 90-plus-degree day. The last time that happened was 2011.</p>

Maybe years like that are no more, but they weren't all that rare in the past. Since 1945, there have been 16 years with zero very hot days — zero times when people needed tips on staying cool, like [freezing your pillowcase](#). In the three-year stretch from 1999-2001, the temperature never hit 90 degrees in Seattle.

And in the 10 years from 1945 to 1955, half of those years never got up to 90 degrees. Sounds nice, huh?

It's because of our history of mild summers that Seattle has been — and remains — [the least air-conditioned large metro area in the country](#). The most recent data from the Census Bureau's American Housing Survey shows less than half, 44%, of homes in our metro area had air conditioning in 2019.

Many Seattleites may be starting to feel like air conditioning is no longer optional, as data reveals a big jump in the share of air-conditioned homes in a short period. The 2013 American Housing Survey showed less than one-third, 31%, of homes here had air conditioning.

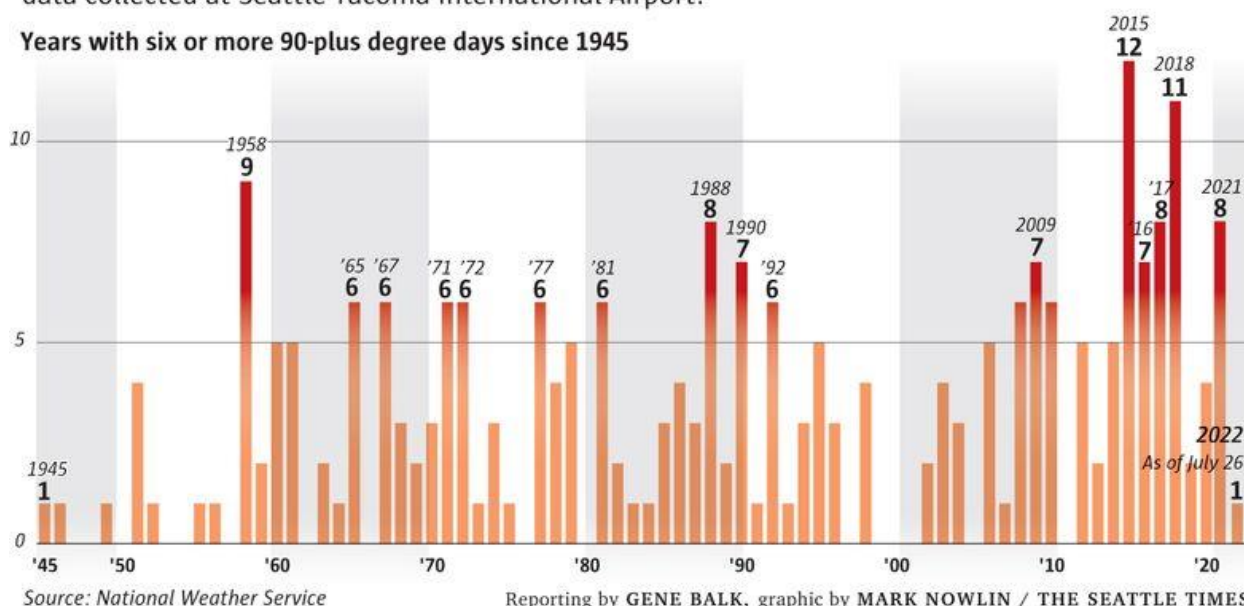
All that said, it's not like there were never hot summers in the past. What may be common now has happened before, but it happened less frequently than what we've seen over the past decade. The most notable example is 1958, when there were nine 90-plus-degree days, the third most on record.

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Seattle's hottest summers

Between 2015-2021, there were five years with at least seven 90-plus degree days, according to data collected at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport.

Years with six or more 90-plus degree days since 1945



HEADLINE	07/27 Seattle clears homeless camp in heatwave
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/seattle-removes-homeless-encampment-in-sodo-during-heat-wave/
GIST	<p>Antwan Watkins already had his shirt off at 9 a.m. Tuesday as temperatures crept above 70 degrees. He hoisted a rolled-up rug onto his shoulders and carried it away from the tarp structure in Sodo he had been living in that was about to be leveled.</p> <p>It was one of many items Watkins would move that day, and it was about to get a lot hotter.</p> <p>On one of the hottest days of the year so far, the city of Seattle cleared a homeless encampment on Third Avenue South and South Walker Street in Sodo where at least 30 people had been living.</p>

The city plans to clear two other encampments during a heat advisory issued by the National Weather Service for noon Tuesday to Friday night, when temperatures around Seattle were forecast to exceed 90 degrees. Tuesday, a daily record of 94 degrees was [recorded at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport](#).

Extreme temperatures can be fatal, especially for people living outdoors with little shade or reprieve from the sun. During last year's brutal heat wave, several people who were presumed to be homeless were confirmed or suspected to have [died from heat exposure](#) when temperatures topped out in the 100s.

Seattle also plans to clear a small encampment at Woodland Park Zoo on Wednesday and a cluster of RVs in Eastlake on Thursday, according to Mayor Bruce Harrell's office. Spokesperson Jamie Housen wrote there is only one tent and one structure in Woodland Park Zoo, but it is up against combustible material which could be a safety risk, especially during the heat wave.

Housen wrote that these removals have been scheduled for weeks before a heat wave was forecast, and they are being completed "with the aim of addressing the public health and safety concerns at those sites while helping those experiencing homelessness get indoors, into shelter, and out of the heat."

The city said it would connect homeless people with cooling centers that the King County Regional Homelessness Authority opened Tuesday morning, provide bus tickets for people to get there, perform welfare checks on homeless encampments and provide water and other supplies to people.

The remaining residents of the Sodo encampment hurried to pack and leave as excavators and loaders hummed and beeped and police officers stood by.

"Five minutes, you have to be off-site," a Seattle Parks and Recreation employee told Watkins as he rushed to pack his bike trailer with as many of his belongings as he could.

Seattle City Councilmember Tammy Morales, whose district includes Sodo, ripped into Harrell's decision to remove the encampment during a heat wave.

"What we saw today was a continued failure of our city response to addressing the root causes of homelessness," Morales' office wrote in a statement. "We know that this extreme heat is dangerous for the many medically vulnerable folks who lived on this street, and being swept is challenging enough without the added stressor of the scorching temperature."

The city and county have also been receiving emails from advocates asking for a halt to homeless encampment removals at least until after the heat wave.

Morales added that there had not been enough shelter capacity to move everyone at the Sodo encampment inside if they wanted it.

Rebecca Gilley, who coordinated outreach for REACH at the encampment, agreed. She said she couldn't offer everyone at the encampment shelter because there had not been enough resources prioritized that fit the needs of the people living there.

The mayor's office responded that "there remain more than enough open spaces in air-conditioned indoor shelters for those who were living onsite at this morning." Many people had left before this morning.

Gilley added that the extreme heat exacerbates the physical exertion of moving and the emotional toll of losing one's home and belongings.

"That's a lot to handle for people," Gilley said.

The King County Regional Homelessness Authority also distanced itself from the Sodo removal.

“(The Regional Homelessness Authority) does not support displacement,” wrote the authority’s communications director Anne Martens. “When we work with partners to resolve an encampment, resolution means that every person has an opportunity to come inside with dignity.”

Harrell’s office said it offered shelter to everyone, starting outreach at the beginning of July. Official notice was given Friday that the clearing would happen Tuesday. Harrell’s office said that 21 people indicated they wanted to go to shelter but that it was unable to provide the number of people who actually enrolled in shelter as of Tuesday.

On Tuesday, outreach workers walked around the encampment offering people cold water and Gatorade and last-minute offers of shelter. Some people planned to take those offers. Crystal Rawlings said she and her boyfriend got on a waitlist for a tiny home, and that the city is putting them up in a hotel temporarily.

But others planned to set up their tent somewhere else outside, some of whom said they had not been offered another place to go.

At the edge of the encampment, leaned up against his car that he sells ice cream out of as a side hustle, Shawn Parenteau waited for his home of the last few months to be demolished. A few weeks ago, he said outreach workers promised him and his girlfriend shelter. But after a shooting at an Aurora homeless encampment on July 17, he said outreach workers told him they needed that shelter for the people on Aurora.

He’s worried that the heat this week will affect his performance at work as a traffic control supervisor for the state.

His girlfriend, Stephanie Emard, said the heat can make tempers rise, hers included. During last year’s high temperatures, she saw more domestic disputes and fights in homeless encampments. And despite there being several cooling centers open around the city, she says it can be difficult for people to travel there.

“I’m right on the cusp of getting everything back in order, man. I just need a little bit of foundation and then I’m there,” Parenteau said.

As of Tuesday morning, he and Emard planned to set up a tent somewhere else.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Seattle mayor selects new SDOT director
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/seattle-mayor-bruce-harrell-looks-to-california-for-new-transportation-director/
GIST	<p>Beneath baking skies on Seattle’s Beacon Hill, Mayor Bruce Harrell announced Wednesday he’s selecting a top Los Angeles transportation official to direct the Seattle Department of Transportation.</p> <p>Gregory Spotts is a 10-year veteran of Los Angeles’ Bureau of Street Services, recently rebranded as StreetsLA. Spotts has advocated for moving a city’s transportation system away from the car-centric visions of the mid-20th century and toward something resembling a “15-minute city” where people can easily access all of their needs.</p> <p>“That sort of 1950s master-planned community, where everything’s separated and the car’s the linkage, that’s just not going to work,” he said on the “Government Huddle” podcast last month.</p> <p>Spotts, 54, is his department’s chief sustainability officer and executive director, one step below the bureau’s leader. He “fits the bill” of a climate-first leader in transportation who will use both data and community outreach to inform his decisions, Harrell said in a news conference.</p>

“We wanted the vision in transportation work to be led by what we consider a national leader in this space,” Harrell said.

If confirmed by the City Council, Spotts must take on the transportation demands of a growing city in a time of great transition. Enormous questions linger about how to plan a transportation system during a pandemic — whether it can or should be what it was before thousands of workers stopped commuting into downtown. At the same time, Seattle is struggling to maintain the old — bridges, roads, sidewalks — while welcoming the new, as light-rail planning builds momentum.

In an interview, Spotts acknowledged the challenges before him. Seattle must plan for the possibly dramatic shifts in transportation, housing and urban planning that may come from remote work, he said. And transit must better serve all trips throughout the city and not center on commuting. No longer can transportation departments predominantly focus on car travel, he said.

Despite those challenges, he struck an optimistic tone about the city’s future. “The combination of some density in the city, some of the great bike and pedestrian and transit infrastructure, the Sound Transit expansion — I just see a lot of ingredients for a very progressive, sustainable vision for the city that we’re missing in a lot of other cities,” he said.

Spotts has worked in government in Los Angeles since 2007. In 2011, he went to work in the mayor’s office, overseeing megaprojects in the city, including expansions of highway and transit.

Since 2015, he’s overseen the city’s efforts to mitigate dangerous heat — of the sort Seattle is experiencing — through [tree planting](#) and [painting cooling surfaces onto the city’s streets](#).

He also took on the work of repairing and cleaning up Los Angeles’ bike infrastructure, [as injuries and lawsuits piled up in the city](#).

Under Mayor Eric Garcetti, Spotts was tasked with mitigating transportation related emissions, reducing serious injuries and deaths on the road and improving streets near parks and for sidewalk vendors.

Listing his [top 10 projects in 2019](#), Spotts pointed to his work surveying the city’s trees, “creating holistic streetscapes to support walking, cycling and transit,” legalizing vending in parks and on sidewalks and cleaning up trash. In one 2019 post on his blog, Spotts [declared](#), “Seattle leads the way in reduced auto dependence.”

Spotts also monitors LA’s [many requests for pothole repairs](#).

Seattle, like much of the country, has seen record traffic deaths recently, with no signs of the trend slowing. With each new report of a pedestrian, biker or driver being injured or killed, pressure increases on the department. Spotts’ history working on “Vision Zero” initiatives to eliminate deaths on the roads was among the reasons Harrell chose him.

Spotts said one of his first priorities was to do a comprehensive review of the city’s efforts to prevent death and injury and to scale up what seems to be working.

Harrell’s office has begun its process of assembling a “Seattle Transportation Plan” that will lay out priorities for the city in the coming years. Outreach has begun, and officials hope to have the plan ready by next summer. In its final state, the document could define how the city intends to balance the needs of pedestrians, bicycles and cars, a highly contentious topic.

Spotts said balancing car traffic with pedestrian and bike facilities is the “million dollar” question in his profession and the answer has shifted. “It’s gone from a profession that was following standards to improve level of traffic for many years and that’s changed, and now there’s lots of people who want a fair share of the public right of way,” he said.

Perhaps the most immediate priority for Spotts is crafting the next transportation ballot proposal. The \$930 million Move Seattle property tax levy, approved by voters in 2015, expires at the end of 2024. The measure has funded large portions of the city's transportation projects. But its deployment has been rocky.

Mayor Jenny Durkan, who took office two years after Move Seattle passed, concluded early in her term the measure had [overpromised on what it could deliver](#), and launched a "reset" to scale back the number of bus lines, bike lanes, repaving and other projects laid out in the original levy.

The question facing Spotts will be how large a package to put before voters and whether the city can win back trust in time to win approval. Harrell said Wednesday he's spoken to Spotts on a "high level" about putting together a proposal, but has not touched on specifics.

Spotts will also need to coordinate with Sound Transit as the regional agency builds out its light-rail network [to North Seattle](#) and finalizes plans for its West Seattle to Ballard line. The future construction of the line is [rife with difficult questions](#), including where to put a station in the Chinatown International District, how and where trains will come and go from West Seattle, and the rails' path through South Lake Union and Uptown.

This week's heat wave is also a stark reminder of the city's climate goals, which include major reductions in transportation emissions.

Among other major issues the transportation director will inherit is a dissatisfied parking enforcement unit, a new First Avenue streetcar line that has hung in limbo for nearly four years, and an evolving scooter and bike-share landscape. Meanwhile, inflation is pushing costs of major construction projects ever higher.

A graduate of Yale, Spotts also has a brief history in the world of entertainment, including with the LA Galaxy soccer team, according to his LinkedIn profile.

Spotts was one of four candidates forwarded to Harrell by a 15-person search committee. If confirmed, Spotts would take the reins in September from interim Director Kristen Simpson, who has led the department since Harrell declined to rehire the previous SDOT head, Sam Zimbabwe.

The department has a staff of about 1,000 people and a budget of \$700 million.

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HEADLINE	07/28 Russia: no deal prisoner exchange
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-prisoner-exchange-talks-with-us-ongoing-no-concrete-results-yet-2022-07-28/
GIST	<p>LONDON, July 28 (Reuters) - Russia said on Thursday that negotiations with the United States on exchanging prisoners are ongoing but there is no deal to swap detained U.S. basketball star Brittney Griner for jailed Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout.</p> <p>Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that "so far there are no agreements in this area".</p> <p>Foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova indicated that talks on prisoner exchanges had been going on for some time but without producing a result.</p> <p>They were responding to comments by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken that Washington had made Moscow a "serious offer" to secure the release of Griner and former U.S. marine Paul Whelan, also detained in Russia.</p> <p>"The issue of the mutual exchange of Russian and American citizens in detention on the territory of the two countries was at one time discussed by the presidents of Russia and the United States," Zakharova said, apparently referring to conversations pre-dating Russia's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.</p>

"They gave instructions to the relevant authorized structures to carry out negotiations. These are being conducted by the competent departments. A concrete result has not yet been achieved."

Negotiations would need to take into account the interests of both sides, she said.

Blinken said on Wednesday he would discuss the Griner and Whelan cases with his Russian counterpart in the coming days.

"When discussing such topics, you don't conduct information attacks," Peskov said in an comment that appeared to reflect irritation with Washington's very public diplomacy on the issue.

On Wednesday, a source familiar with the situation confirmed a CNN report that Washington was willing to exchange Russian dealer Bout, who is serving a 25 year-prison sentence in the United States, as part of a deal.

A Russian lawyer for Whelan has previously said he believed Moscow wanted Bout to be part of a swap for Whelan.

Griner, detained at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport in February with vape cartridges containing cannabis oil in her luggage, was in the courtroom on Wednesday in the latest hearing of her trial on drug charges. The next hearing is set for Aug. 2.

"From a legal point of view, an exchange is only possible after a court verdict," Griner's lawyer in Russia, Maria Blagovolina, said in a statement.

Whelan was sentenced in 2020 to 16 years in prison in Russia, accused of spying. He denied spying and said he was set up in a sting operation.

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HEADLINE	07/28 US carrier returns South China Sea
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-carrier-strike-group-returns-south-china-sea-amid-taiwan-tensions-2022-07-28/
GIST	<p>HONG KONG, July 28 (Reuters) - A U.S. aircraft carrier and its strike group have returned to the South China Sea after a port call in Singapore, deploying in the disputed region as tensions with China rise over a possible visit to Taiwan by congressional leader Nancy Pelosi.</p> <p>Officials with the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet confirmed the deployment of the USS Ronald Reagan to the vital trade route but did not comment on questions about tensions over the trip by Pelosi, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.</p> <p>"USS Ronald Reagan and her strike group are underway, operating in the South China Sea following a successful port visit to Singapore," Commander Hayley Sims said in a statement to Reuters.</p> <p>Sims added that the Reagan "is continuing normal, scheduled operations as part of her routine patrol in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific."</p> <p>When asked for comment, China's foreign ministry said the US was once again "flexing its muscles" in the South China Sea with the Reagan's sailing.</p> <p>"It is clear from this for everyone to see who is the biggest threat to the South China Sea and the Asian region's peace and stability," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a regular briefing on Thursday.</p>

News of the deployment of the Japan-based carrier comes as Beijing and Washington trade diplomatic blows over Pelosi's visit, reportedly due to take place next month after being postponed earlier in the year. Pelosi has not confirmed the possible trip.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Wednesday he had spoken with Pelosi and given her a security assessment but any comments about a trip she might make to Taiwan would have to come from her office.

Tensions over democratically-ruled Taiwan are expected to be discussed when U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping hold their fifth phone call, which could take place as soon as Thursday.

China has issued stern warnings to U.S. officials about Pelosi's possible visit to Taiwan, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said on Monday. Beijing considers Taiwan to be part of its territory and has never renounced using force to bring the island under its control.

The Reagan strike group had been operating in the South China Sea earlier in the month before heading for a five-day rest stop in Singapore at the weekend.

Singapore-based security scholar Ian Storey said he would expect Chinese vessels to shadow the strike group, based on recent actions as well as the latest tensions.

"Most of the time those interactions are safe and professional, but there's always a risk they could get too close and spark a confrontation, said Storey, of the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

U.S. officials on Tuesday accused China of increased "provocations" against rival claimants in the South China Sea and said its "aggressive and irresponsible behavior" meant it was only a matter of time before there was a major incident or accident.

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HEADLINE	07/28 Russia secret web of agents in Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-russia-saboteurs/
GIST	<p>When the first armoured vehicles of Russia's invading army reached the heart of Chornobyl nuclear plant on the afternoon of Feb. 24, they encountered a Ukrainian unit charged with defending the notorious facility.</p> <p>In less than two hours, and without a fight, the 169 members of the Ukrainian National Guard laid down their weapons. Russia had taken Chornobyl, a repository for tonnes of nuclear material and a key staging post on the approach to Kyiv.</p> <p>The fall of Chornobyl, site of the world's worst nuclear disaster, stands out as an anomaly in the five-month old war: a successful blitzkrieg operation in a conflict marked elsewhere by a brutal and halting advance by Russian troops and grinding resistance by Ukraine.</p> <p>Now a Reuters investigation has found that Russia's success at Chornobyl was no accident, but part of a long-standing Kremlin operation to infiltrate the Ukrainian state with secret agents.</p> <p>Five people with knowledge of the Kremlin's preparations said war planners around President Vladimir Putin believed that, aided by these agents, Russia would require only a small military force and a few days to force Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's administration to quit, flee or capitulate.</p> <p>Through interviews with dozens of officials in Russia and Ukraine and a review of Ukrainian court documents and statements to investigators, related to a probe into the conduct of people who worked at Chornobyl, Reuters has established that this infiltration reached far deeper than has been publicly acknowledged. The officials interviewed include people inside Russia who were briefed on Moscow's invasion planning and Ukrainian investigators tasked with tracking down spies.</p>

“Apart from the external enemy, we unfortunately have an internal enemy, and this enemy is no less dangerous,” the secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defence Council, Oleksiy Danilov, said in an interview.

At the time of the invasion, Danilov said, Russia had agents in the Ukrainian defence, security and law enforcement sectors. He declined to give names but said such traitors needed to be “neutralised” at all costs.

Ukraine’s State Bureau of Investigation is conducting a probe into whether the National Guard acted unlawfully by surrendering its weapons to an enemy, a local official told Reuters. The State Bureau of Investigation didn’t comment. The National Guard defended the actions of its unit at the plant, pointing to the risks of conflict at a nuclear site.

Court documents and testimony, reported here for the first time, reveal the role played by Chornobyl’s head of security, Valentin Viter, who is in detention and is being investigated for absenting himself from his post. An extract from the state register of pre-trial investigations, seen by Reuters, shows Viter is also suspected of treason, an allegation his lawyer says is unfounded. In a statement to investigators, Viter said that on the day of the invasion he spoke by phone with the National Guard unit commander. Viter advised the commander not to endanger his unit, telling him: “Spare your people.”

One source with direct knowledge of the Kremlin’s invasion plans told Reuters that Russian agents were deployed to Chornobyl last year to bribe officials and prepare the ground for a bloodless takeover. Reuters couldn’t independently verify the details of this assertion. However, Ukraine’s State Bureau of Investigation has said it is investigating a former top intelligence official, Andriy Naumov, on suspicion of treason for passing Chornobyl security secrets to a foreign state. A lawyer for Naumov declined to comment.

At a national level, sources with knowledge of the Kremlin’s plans said Moscow was counting on activating sleeper agents inside the Ukrainian security apparatus. The sources confirmed Western intelligence reports that the Kremlin was lining up Oleg Tsaryov, a hotelier, to lead a puppet government in Kyiv. And a former Ukrainian prosecutor general disclosed to Reuters in June that Ukrainian politician Viktor Medvedchuk, a friend of Putin, had an encrypted phone issued by Russia so he could communicate with the Kremlin.

Tsaryov said the Reuters account of how Moscow’s operation overall unfolded “has very little to do with reality.” He did not address his relationship with the Kremlin. A lawyer for Medvedchuk declined to comment. Medvedchuk is in a Ukrainian jail awaiting trial on treason charges that pre-date the Russian invasion.

Though Russia captured Chornobyl, its plan to take power in Kyiv failed. In many cases, the sleeper agents Moscow had installed failed to do their job, according to multiple sources in Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine Security Council Secretary Danilov said the agents and their handlers believed Ukraine was weak, which was “a total misconception.”

People the Kremlin counted on as its proxies in Ukraine overstated their influence in the years leading up to the invasion, said four of the sources with knowledge of the Kremlin’s preparations. The Kremlin relied in its planning on “clowns – they know a little bit, but they always say what the leadership wants to hear because otherwise they won’t get paid,” said one of the four, a person close to the Moscow-backed separatist leadership in eastern Ukraine.

Putin now finds himself in a protracted, full-scale war, fighting for every inch of territory at huge cost.

But the Russian intelligence infiltration did succeed in one way: It has sown mistrust inside Ukraine and laid bare the shortcomings of Ukraine’s near 30,000-strong Security Service of Ukraine, or SBU, which shares a complicated history with Russia, and is now tasked with hunting down traitors and collaborators.

This internal Ukrainian turmoil burst into partial view on July 17. In a video address to the nation, President Zelenskiy suspended SBU head Ivan Bakanov, whom he has known for years, citing the large number of SBU staff suspected of treason. Ukrainian law enforcement sources told Reuters that some SBU staff recounted in conversation with them that they were unable to reach Bakanov for several days after Russia invaded, adding to a sense of chaos in Kyiv. Bakanov didn't respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

Zelenskiy also said 651 cases of alleged treason and collaboration have been opened against individuals involved in law enforcement and in the prosecutor's office. More than 60 officials from the SBU and the prosecutor general's office are working against Ukraine in Russian-occupied zones, Zelenskiy added.

Asked to comment on Reuters' findings, the Ukrainian presidential administration, the SBU and the prosecutor general's office did not respond. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "All these questions have no relation whatsoever to us, therefore there is nothing for us to comment on here." The Russian intelligence agency, the FSB, and the defence ministry did not respond to Reuters' questions.

KGB TIES

Moscow's spy apparatus has been intertwined with Chornobyl for decades. After the 1986 disaster, when a reactor blew up scattering radioactive clouds across Europe, the Soviet KGB stepped in. More than 1,000 KGB staff took part in the clean-up, according to a declassified internal memo to a Ukrainian government minister, dated 1991. Then-KGB boss Viktor Chebrikov ordered his officers to recruit agents among the plant's staff and instructed that a KGB officer should hold the post of deputy boss of the plant in charge of security, according to another memo - an internal KGB communication from 1986.

Even after Ukraine became independent in 1991, Moscow's spy chiefs remained powerful there. The first head of Ukraine's domestic intelligence service was Nikolai Golushko, who started his career in Soviet Russia. Before his appointment he led the Ukraine arm of the Soviet KGB. Golushko kept most of the Soviet-era officers in their jobs, he wrote in a 2012 memoir.

After four months as Ukraine's spy chief, Golushko moved back to Moscow to rejoin KGB headquarters, and in 1993 became head of Russia's newly created Federal Counter-Intelligence Service, precursor to today's FSB.

In Moscow, Golushko received a visit from the deputy head of Ukraine's State Security Service, Golushko wrote in the memoir. He recalled how Oleg Pugach, the Ukrainian official, asked for Golushko's help finding fabric to make the uniforms for Ukraine's intelligence officers. Golushko also wrote that Kyiv, short of its own resources and expertise, signed deals under which the SBU agreed to share intelligence information with Moscow. In exchange, Moscow provided supplies, technology and expert help with investigations. Reuters approached Golushko for comment. A colleague from an intelligence veterans' group told Reuters Golushko, now 85, was in ill health and could not answer questions. Reuters was unable to reach Pugach and couldn't independently confirm Golushko's account.

Intelligence officers working at Chornobyl officially became part of Ukraine's security apparatus in 1991, but they continued to take orders from Moscow, said the person with direct knowledge of the invasion plan. "In effect, these were FSB employees," said the person. The SBU did not respond to questions about Chornobyl or historical ties to Russian intelligence.

The Chornobyl nuclear plant is a vast facility. A giant steel structure encases Reactor No. 4, ground zero of the 1986 disaster. The plant lies just 10 kilometres at the closest point from the border with Belarus, in a dense and highly irradiated forest. Russia's war planners considered control of Chornobyl to be strategically important because it sat on the shortest route for their advance on Kyiv, according to Western military analysts.

The source with direct knowledge of the invasion plan said that in November 2021 Russia started sending undercover intelligence agents to Ukraine, tasked with establishing contacts with officials responsible for securing the Chornobyl power plant. The agents' goal was to ensure there would be no armed resistance once Russian troops rolled in. The source said Chornobyl also served as a drop-off point for documents from SBU headquarters. In return for payment, Ukrainian officials handed Russian spies information about Ukraine's military readiness.

Reuters could not independently verify details of the source's account, and neither Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigation nor the SBU responded to the news agency's questions. But a review of Ukrainian testimony and court documents and an interview with a local official show that Kyiv is conducting at least three investigations into the conduct of people who worked at Chornobyl. The investigations have identified at least two people suspected of providing information to Russian agents or otherwise helping them seize the plant, according to these documents.

VALENTIN VITER CHORNOBYL'S HEAD OF SECURITY

Viter is in detention in Ukraine on suspicion of absenting himself from his post. An extract from the court register, seen by Reuters, shows law enforcement agents have begun a second probe into Viter, for suspected treason. His lawyer rejects the allegations.

One of the men suspected by Ukrainian prosecutors and investigators of helping Russian forces is Valentin Viter, a 47-year-old colonel in the SBU. At the time of the Russian invasion, Viter was the deputy general-director of the plant responsible for its physical protection.

In May last year, Viter oversaw a routine training exercise that was meant to simulate an attack by armed saboteurs. Armed members of the National Guard unit that protects Chornobyl took part, and rehearsed repelling the attackers by force. Viter said the exercise was a success, according to a video interview posted shortly afterwards on the plant's website. He also said he hoped Chornobyl's security team would "not need to apply the knowledge and skills we acquired in a real-life situation."

Viter was seconded from the SBU to work at Chornobyl as security chief in mid-2019, according to a statement he gave to investigators. In a further statement, he said that on Feb. 18 this year – six days before the Russian invasion – he went on sick leave with a respiratory problem.

By then, Russia was bolstering its troops in Belarus in preparation for an invasion, U.S. officials said at the time. Satellite images shot by U.S. satellite imagery company Maxar on Feb. 15 showed a military pontoon bridge under construction across the Pripyat River in Belarus, north of the power plant. Ukraine's police, and the SBU, were on heightened alert in response to the Russian threat, and the national police chief said in a statement at the time that security was reinforced at the Chornobyl plant.

On the morning of the Russian invasion, Feb. 24, Viter said, in a statement to investigators, that he was at his home in Kyiv. He telephoned the head of the Chornobyl National Guard unit, who was at his post. By then, people at the plant knew a column of Russian armoured vehicles was heading their way.

Viter, according to his testimony to Ukrainian investigators, told the commander, in Russian: "Spare your people." Viter had no official authority over the National Guard, and Reuters could not determine whether the commander was heeding Viter's words when the unit surrendered after discussions with the Russian invaders. A National Guard statement identified the unit commander as Yuriy Pindak.

When the Russian soldiers finally retreated from Chornobyl after a 36-day occupation, they took Pindak and most of his unit away as captives. Ukraine says the guards are being held in Russia or Belarus. Russian officials did not comment on the unit's whereabouts.

Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigation is conducting a probe into whether the National Guard broke the law by laying down arms, said Yuriy Fomichev, mayor of the town of Slavutych where most of the

Chornobyl workers live. Fomichev said he was not aware of anyone having been charged. The State Bureau of Investigation didn't respond to Reuters' questions about the matter.

The National Guard declined to comment on the actions of individual commanders and members of the unit tasked with protecting Chornobyl. "Fighting on the territory of nuclear facilities is prohibited by the Geneva Convention," it said, adding that this was "one of the reasons" why there was no heavy fighting at the site. It referred questions about any investigation to the Bureau.

Article 56 of an additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions states that nuclear power plants and other dangerous installations should not be attacked.

Viter was arrested in western Ukraine and is now in pre-trial detention there on suspicion of absenting himself from his post. An extract from the court's register, seen by Reuters, shows that law enforcement agents have initiated a second investigation into Viter for suspected treason by "deliberately assisting the military units of the aggressor country, the Russian Federation, in carrying out subversive activities against Ukraine." They have yet to uncover evidence tying him to Russian special services.

Viter has said in court statements that he fled Kyiv for the safety of his family two days after Chornobyl was seized but tried to stay in contact with colleagues at the plant.

His lawyer, Oleksandr Kovalenko, said Viter had a legitimate reason for being off work and was unaware that he should stay at Chornobyl. The lawyer said any treason allegation was unfounded and Viter had not been served with a letter of suspicion, a step which usually precedes charges. According to the lawyer, Viter said "Spare your people" to remind the National Guard commander that many people depended on him. Viter did not discuss surrender, Kovalenko said. He added that investigators had not asked Viter about any exchange of documents at Chornobyl.

CASH AND EMERALDS

The extent to which Russia infiltrated Chornobyl has focused Ukrainian authorities' attention on the SBU, the agency Viter worked for, sources said. In particular, military prosecutors on Viter's case are interested in his connection to a former Ukrainian official called Andriy Naumov, according to sources with knowledge of the investigation and a transcript of Viter's questioning seen by Reuters.

ANDRIY NAUMOV

FORMER TOP INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL

Naumov vanished before the Russian invasion. He turned up in Serbia in June in a car stuffed with cash and emeralds, according to a police statement. Ukraine's State Bureau of Investigation said it is conducting a pre-trial investigation into Naumov for state treason. Naumov's lawyer declined to comment.

Previously an official in the Ukrainian prosecutor's office, by 2018 Naumov had been appointed head of COTIZ, a state enterprise responsible for estate-management of the radioactive exclusion zone around Chornobyl. A major part of COTIZ's role was to promote "extreme tourism" in the exclusion zone, but the enterprise also had a role in keeping the site secure, according to its website.

After his stint at Chornobyl, Naumov was made the head of the SBU's department of internal security, a division that investigates other officers suspected of criminal activity. Last year, the agency said it thwarted an assassination attempt on Naumov by other SBU officers. Naumov was later fired as department chief, according to Ukrainian media outlet Ukrainska Pravda and a law enforcement source.

Naumov vanished shortly before the invasion, a person in law enforcement said. He eventually turned up in Serbia in June. A Serbian police statement issued on June 8 said police and anti-corruption agents had arrested a Ukrainian citizen identified by the initials "A.N." on the border with North Macedonia. He had been trying to cross into North Macedonia from Serbia. A search of the BMW in which he was a passenger uncovered \$124,924 and 607,990 euros in cash, plus two emeralds, the statement said. It said the individual and the unnamed driver of the BMW, who was also detained, were suspected of intending to

launder the cash and emeralds, which police believe originated from criminal activities. Volodymyr Tolkach, Ukraine's ambassador to Serbia, publicly confirmed the arrested man was Naumov.

The State Bureau of Investigation confirmed a local media report that it is conducting a pre-trial investigation into Naumov for state treason. It said it was looking into whether Naumov collected information on the security set-up at Chornobyl while working at the plant and later at the SBU and passed it to a foreign state. The statement did not say what grounds it had for suspecting he passed on secrets or if it had specific evidence linking him to Russia.

On March 31, President Zelenskiy issued a decree stripping Naumov of his brigadier-general rank. The same day, the Ukrainian president announced in an emotional address that Naumov and another SBU general were "traitors" who violated their oath of allegiance to Ukraine. Zelenskiy did not make reference to Chornobyl.

Naumov remains in detention in Serbia and could not be reached for comment. His lawyer in Serbia, Viktor Gostiljac, declined to comment. The SBU did not reply to questions about Naumov.

DECAPITATION

For Russia's war planners, seizing Chornobyl was just a stepping stone to the main objective: taking control of the Ukrainian national government in Kyiv. There, too, the Kremlin expected that undercover agents in positions of power would play a crucial part, according to four sources with knowledge of the plan.

Yuriy Lutsenko, who served as Ukraine's prosecutor general from 2016 until 2019, revealed to Reuters that at the time he left the role "hundreds" of Defence Ministry employees were under surveillance, approved by his office, because they were suspected of ties to the Russian state. Lutsenko said he believed there were similar numbers of suspected spies in other ministries.

Russia's war planners were also counting on other allies to help in the takeover, five sources said.

VIKTOR MEDVEDCHUK

LEADER OF UKRAINE'S OPPOSITION PLATFORM – FOR LIFE PARTY

Medvedchuk was charged with state treason on May 11, 2021. Investigators from the SBU alleged at the time that he passed secret details about Ukrainian military units to Russian officials. Medvedchuk denies the charges.

One of the most visible loyalists was Viktor Medvedchuk, a leader of Ukraine's Opposition Platform – For Life party. Putin is god-father to one of Medvedchuk's children. Since 2014, Medvedchuk has been a vocal opponent of the popular protests that called for closer ties to the European Union.

Medvedchuk was charged with state treason on May 11, 2021. Investigators from the SBU alleged at the time that Medvedchuk passed secret details about Ukrainian military units to Russian officials, and intended to recruit Ukrainian agents and covertly influence Ukrainian politics. The day before the invasion, he left his home in Kyiv and was planning on leaving the country, in violation of the terms of his bail, according to the SBU.

Medvedchuk was detained on April 12, Zelenskiy announced that day. Zelenskiy immediately posted pictures of him handcuffed, in Ukrainian military fatigues and looking bedraggled. Medvedchuk has since been in detention.

Medvedchuk has denied the treason charges, saying they were falsified and part of a political plot against him. Kremlin spokesman Peskov told reporters on April 13 Medvedchuk had no back-channel communication with the Russian leadership.

Lutsenko, the former Ukraine prosecutor general, told Reuters that before the Russian invasion, Medvedchuk used an encrypted telephone that was issued to him by the Kremlin, equipment reserved only for the most senior Russian officials and pro-Russian separatist leaders. Lutsenko said Ukrainian investigators had managed to hack the encrypted phone system, without disclosing what they found.

Medvedchuk's lawyer, Tetyana Zhukovska, declined to comment until a court has handed down a decision in the case. The Ukrainian prosecutor's office did not comment.

OLEG TSARYOV HOTELIER

Early on Feb. 24, Tsaryov announced on social media he had crossed into Kyiv-controlled territory. "Kyiv will be free from fascists." Three sources familiar with Russia's plans said Kremlin planners picked Tsaryov to lead an interim puppet government. Tsaryov says Reuters' account of the overall operation "has very little to do with reality."

Another key figure, according to three sources familiar with the Russian plans, was Oleg Tsaryov, a square-jawed 52-year-old former member of Ukraine's parliament. He was picked by Kremlin invasion planners to lead the new interim government they planned to install, these sources said. Their comments are the first confirmation from within Russia of U.S. intelligence assessments, reported by the Financial Times earlier this year, that Moscow was considering putting Tsaryov in a leadership role in a puppet government in Kyiv.

Tsaryov has been under Ukrainian and U.S. sanctions since 2014, when, after a bid to win election as Ukrainian president collapsed, he headed up a body called "Novorossiya," or New Russia. The group pushed the idea of turning southeastern Ukraine into a separate pro-Russian statelet. By the start of this year, he was in Russian-annexed Crimea, where he owns two hotels.

In the early hours of Feb. 24, at the start of the invasion, Tsaryov told his more than 200,000 Telegram followers he had crossed into Kyiv-controlled territory. "I'm in Ukraine. Kyiv will be free from fascists."

But Zelenskiy did not capitulate. Any expectations in Moscow that he would flee Kyiv or negotiate a deal that would cede to Russia's demands soon evaporated. In the weeks that followed, Ukrainian forces halted Russian troops' advance on Kyiv.

Tsaryov never made it to the capital. On June 10, he posted an advertisement to his Telegram followers for his seaside hotel in Crimea, where a one-night stay costs 1,500 roubles (\$28) per person per night. Tsaryov is now spending his time in Crimea with visits to Moscow, according to his social media posts.

PARANOIA AND MISTRUST

Russia's campaign of infiltration did, however, stir suspicion and mistrust at some levels of the Ukrainian state, which hampered its ability to govern, especially in the first few days after the invasion.

One stark incident that fuelled the tensions in Kyiv's power corridors related to the death in early March of Denys Kirieiev, a former bank executive, several sources said. He was a member of the Ukrainian delegation that took part in short-lived talks with Russian negotiators on the Ukraine-Belarus border, starting on Feb. 28. A photograph showed Kirieiev sitting alongside Ukrainian officials at the negotiating table.

An advisor to the Zelenskiy administration said, in an online interview, that officers from the SBU shot Kirieiev while trying to arrest him as a Russian spy.

But Ukraine's Military Intelligence Agency said Kirieiev was its employee and intelligence officer, and that he died a hero while conducting an unspecified special assignment defending Ukraine. A source close to the Ukrainian military told Reuters that Kirieiev was indeed a spy working for Ukraine. He had access

to the highest levels of the Russian leadership, this source said, and was feeding back valuable information on invasion plans and other matters to his handlers in Kyiv.

IVAN BAKANOV

FORMER HEAD OF SECURITY SERVICE OF UKRAINE

On July 17, in a video address to the nation, President Zelenskiy suspended Bakanov, whom he has known for years, citing the large number of SBU staff suspected of treason. Bakanov didn't respond to questions from Reuters.

Amid the chaos early in the war, Bakanov, then the head of the SBU, left Kyiv for at least three days after the Russian invasion, according to three people in Ukrainian law enforcement. Two of these people said some SBU staff recounted they were unable to reach Bakanov for several days after Russia invaded. In suspending Bakanov on July 17, Zelenskiy cited an article in Ukraine's Armed Forces statute, under which servicemen can be relieved of their duties for improper conduct leading to casualties or a threat of casualties.

Bakanov and the SBU did not respond to Reuters' questions.

Zelenskiy, in his speech, stressed the toll Russian infiltration was taking on his embattled country by speaking of the numerous officials who have been accused of betraying Ukraine.

"Such an array of crimes against the foundations of the national security of the state ... poses very serious questions to the relevant leaders," Zelenskiy said.

"Each of these questions will receive a proper answer."

Fear and suspicion as Ukraine hunts for traitors in the east

As Ukraine hunts for traitors, the fear of Russian infiltration extends east, far from the capital.

The sense of paranoia runs deepest here, in eastern Ukraine, where suspicions of treason committed by locals divide formerly occupied villages like Kutuzivka, a once-sleepy hamlet east of Kharkiv, where signs of a recent Russian presence are everywhere.

Stray dogs roam over broken glass as the sound of shelling echoes overhead, with Ukrainian troops still fighting off a near-constant barrage of artillery fire by Russian troops north of the village when Reuters visited at the end of May.

When Russian troops arrived in Kutuzivka in early March, they quickly set up a local puppet administration.

Nataliia Kyrychenko, a 55-year-old farm owner in the village, was hiding in her house with several neighbours when Russian soldiers came to her door. Villagers said a Russian commander brought Kyrychenko and her neighbours out onto the street and informed them that a local woman named Nadiia Antonova would now head the village.

Kyrychenko said she was interrogated for two days by Russian forces about her son-in-law, who is in Ukrainian law enforcement. The soldiers told her, Kyrychenko recounted to Reuters, that Antonova had informed them about her son-in-law and accused her of working as a spotter for Ukrainian troops, tasked with tracking movements of Russian soldiers.

"When the Russian soldiers took me away I honestly didn't think I would come back," she said. "I couldn't believe that someone in our community would turn me in."

Kyrychenko was eventually released. Russian officials at the Kremlin did not respond to Reuters' questions about the case.

In late April, Ukraine successfully pushed back Russian troops and liberated Kutuzivka. Antonova was swiftly detained and placed under criminal investigation for collaborating with Russian soldiers. She faces more than a decade in jail if convicted. Antonova's lawyer did not respond to Reuters' questions.

In a speech earlier this month, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy spoke about the high toll Russian infiltration was taking on the country. Below the highest levels of treason he highlighted, there are many more cases that fall into a grey area. These cases can range from those who post pro-Russian content on social media to those who cooperate in any way with occupying Russian troops.

"Our population played a very big role in informing police, alerting us to saboteurs," said Yevhen Yenin, the first deputy minister of the internal affairs ministry, which oversees the national police.

Though the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) is officially tasked with investigating such cases, much of the practical work of gathering information has fallen to the police, Yenin said.

The National Police have so far detained more than 1,000 people suspected of sabotage and reconnaissance activities on behalf of the Russian authorities, according to the internal affairs ministry.

In Kharkiv, about 40 kilometres from the Russian border, four police officers began their night patrol just after the city's 10 p.m. curfew in late May. Touting AKs and wearing bulletproof vests, the officers scoured the city's darkened streets for suspicious figures.

"Whenever we stop anybody we try to understand where they live, to identify who they are, and whether they speak Ukrainian or not," said Tymur, who declined to give his last name.

Their car sped up as an air raid siren howled overhead. The officers made their way down into a subway station for shelter. Fifteen minutes later, they reemerged to patrol the deserted streets until dawn.

Antonova's case has attracted attention in Russia. Margarita Simonyan, editor-in-chief of Russian state television channel RT, said on television that Antonova had helped the Russian operation and was now being unfairly punished. "We need to save those we can save, and reward those who need to be rewarded," Simonyan said.

In an indication of the complexities of such cases, some villagers also say Antonova is being unfairly targeted. They say Antonova ensured that villagers had food and protected them from mistreatment by Russian soldiers during the occupation.

"Can you call it collaboration when the Russians are putting their guns against her back?" one resident shouted outside of a kindergarten where a dozen villagers still live underground.

But regional chief prosecutor Oleksandr Filchakov said investigators had evidence Antonova fed information to the enemy that led to the deaths of Ukrainians. While he acknowledged the sympathies of some villagers, Filchakov said Ukrainians needed justice.

"She must be held responsible," he said.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Russia officials beg donations for troops
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/russian-officials-beg-for-donations-to-buy-troops-equipment/ar-AA101OWz
GIST	Officials in Morskoy used the popular networking sites Odnoklassniki and V Kontakte to plead for donations to buy quadcopters, gas generators, binoculars, compression bandages, and combat application tourniquets used by the U.S. and other NATO countries, according to the Siberian news outlet Taiga.info .

	<p>“The goods can be handed over to the administration of Morskoy village on business days,” one posting reportedly read, along with pro-Putin and pro-war hashtags. The appeals were later deleted.</p> <p>The equipment on the local officials’ wish list was said to be meant for members of an anti-aircraft missile regiment heading for Ukraine, though it was not clear why the Russian military was not supplying such equipment.</p> <p>Russian troops already in Ukraine have routinely been caught complaining about military commanders providing them with no equipment or shoddy gear in intercepted phone calls to relatives back home, according to Ukrainian intelligence. Others have reportedly been forced to plead with their mothers to buy them protective equipment.</p> <p>While some Western experts have said Russia is likely close to depleting its resources several months into the war against Ukraine, the issues with equipment for troops has reportedly plagued them throughout the so-called “special military operation.”</p> <p>“We have to buy everything ourselves, with our own money. I’m not even talking about modern body armor and helmets: there are no warm clothes, no dry rations or first-aid kits. And all the equipment we are fighting with in Ukraine is in Soviet mothballs, the weapons just jam,” one soldier told The Moscow Times anonymously back in May.</p> <p>“We ask the command to provide at least some additional protection. They just shrug.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 CDC: monkeypox reportable condition
SOURCE	https://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/27/cdc-monkeypox-reportable-condition-00048188
GIST	<p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is set to make monkeypox a nationally notifiable condition, directing states across the country to share surveillance data, including case numbers, according to a senior administration official and two other people with knowledge of the situation.</p> <p>The new designation will take effect Aug. 1, according to a letter the agency sent to state epidemiologists on Monday.</p> <p>The move, which comes more than two months after monkeypox began spreading in the United States, offers the CDC a better understanding of how far and fast the virus is spreading. Every state will have to report a confirmed or probable monkeypox case within 24 hours, the letter states.</p> <p>Nearly 3,600 cases have been reported in the U.S., according to the CDC, including 439 on Monday, the highest one-day total to date. Yet state health departments, which share information on positive cases, suspected cases and the number of people treated, are not required to provide the federal government with standardized data, leaving the CDC with a patchwork understanding of the virus’ spread.</p> <p>“Making the condition nationally notifiable positions public health to continuing to monitor and respond to monkeypox after the current outbreak recedes,” CDC spokesperson Kristen Nordlund said Wednesday.</p> <p>Declaring monkeypox a nationally notifiable condition, however, offers health officials only a glimpse. This would not let them know, for example, how many people have been vaccinated.</p> <p>Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra told CNN this week that the agency could not require states to provide data.</p> <p>“We need the states ... to feed us data,” Becerra said. “Most of the time we can’t require states to do this. On Covid, until we declared a public health emergency and started to enact these emergency authorities, we could not require states to provide us this data.”</p>

	<p>The administration is still debating whether to declare monkeypox a public health emergency and what ways the response could be enhanced if it did. But the administration does not need to declare monkeypox a public health emergency to make it a nationally notifiable condition, the senior administration official said.</p> <p>In another sign of the administration's heightened response, the FDA on Wednesday announced it had cleared an additional facility in Denmark to finish manufacturing monkeypox vaccines, allowing more doses to be distributed and administered.</p> <p>Last week, the World Health Organization declared monkeypox a global health emergency. WHO officials on Tuesday warned of increasing transmission, urging people in communities where case numbers are high to take precaution by avoiding sexual intercourse.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Pending home sales fell 20% in June
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/07/27/pending-home-sales-fell-20percent-in-june-versus-a-year-earlier-as-mortgage-rates-soared.html
GIST	<p>Signed contracts to purchase existing homes dropped 20% in June compared with the same month a year ago, the National Association of Realtors said Wednesday.</p> <p>That is the slowest pace since September 2011, with the exception of the first two months of the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns, when sales plunged briefly and then rebounded sharply.</p> <p>On a monthly basis, pending home sales fell a wider-than-expected 8.6% in June. A Dow Jones survey of economists had predicted a 1% drop.</p> <p>The steep declines coincided with a sharp jump in mortgage interest rates. The average on the 30-year fixed loan crossed over 6% in the middle of June, according to Mortgage News Daily. It started the year around 3%. Those high rates and inflation in the general economy are hitting buyer sentiment hard.</p> <p>“Contract signings to buy a home will keep tumbling down as long as mortgage rates keep climbing, as has happened this year to date,” said Lawrence Yun, chief economist for NAR. “There are indications that mortgage rates may be topping or very close to a cyclical high in July. If so, pending contracts should also begin to stabilize.”</p> <p>The drop in sales was widespread, with the South and West seeing the worst of it. In the Northeast, pending sales fell 6.7% compared with May and were down 17.6% from June 2021. Sales were off 3.8% for the month in the Midwest and down 13.4% annually.</p> <p>In the South, sales declined 8.9% monthly and 19.2% from the previous year. The results were worst in the West as sales tumbled 15.9% monthly and 30.9% from June 2021.</p> <p>Another report on sales of newly built homes in June, which are also counted by signed contracts, showed a similar drop, according to the U.S. Census. Builders are now offering more incentives to offload rising inventory, although prices are still higher than they were a year ago.</p> <p>The NAR is now forecasting total sales for this year will be down 13%, but that they should start to rise in early 2023. But that upbeat forecast does depend on mortgage rate levels.</p> <p>“Looking ahead, a slowdown in economic activity and pullback in business investments could lead to a moderation in the pace of mortgage rate gains, as investors shift allocations toward the safety of bonds,” said George Ratiu, senior economist at Realtor.com. “Combined with the increase in housing supply, we could see improved opportunities for homebuyers later in the year.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/28 Russia strikes on Ukraine intensify
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russian-strikes-on-ukraine-intensify-amid-counterattacks/
GIST	<p>Russian forces on Thursday launched massive missile strikes on Ukraine's Kyiv and Chernihiv regions, areas that haven't been targeted in weeks, while Ukrainian officials announced an operation to liberate an occupied region in the country's south.</p> <p>Kyiv regional governor Oleksiy Kuleba said on Telegram that a settlement in the Vyshgorod district of the region was targeted early on Thursday morning and an "infrastructure object" was hit. It wasn't immediately clear if there were any casualties.</p> <p>Vyshhgorod is about 12 miles north of downtown Kyiv. Kuleba linked the strikes with the Day of Statehood, which Ukraine was marking for the first time on Thursday.</p> <p>"Russia, with the help of missiles, is mounting revenge for the widespread popular resistance, which the Ukrainians were able to organize precisely because of their statehood," Kuleba told Ukrainian television. "Ukraine has already broken Russia's plans and will continue to defend itself."</p> <p>Chernihiv governor Vyacheslav Chaus reported that multiple missiles were fired from the territory of Belarus at the village of Honcharivska.</p> <p>Russian troops withdrew from the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions months ago after failing to capture either. The renewed strikes on the areas come a day after the leader of pro-Kremlin separatists in the east, Denis Pushilin, publicly called on the Russian forces to "liberate Russian cities founded by the Russian people — Kyiv, Chernihiv, Poltava, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Lutsk."</p> <p>Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, also came under a barrage of shelling overnight, its mayor Ihor Terekhov said. The southern city of Mykolaiv was fired at as well, with one person sustaining injuries.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military continued to counterattack in the occupied southern region of Kherson, striking a key bridge over the Dnieper River on Wednesday.</p> <p>Ukrainian media on Thursday quoted Ukraine's presidential adviser, Oleksiy Arestovich, as saying that the operation to liberate Kherson "has already begun." Arestovich said Kyiv's forces were planning to isolate Russian troops there and leave them with three options — to "retreat, if possible, surrender or be destroyed."</p> <p>Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, in televised remarks on Wednesday said he was "cautious" in assessing the timeline of the possible counteroffensive. "I would really like it to be much faster," he said, adding that "the enemy is now concentrating the maximum number (of forces) precisely in the Kherson direction."</p> <p>"A very large-scale movement of their troops has begun, they are gathering additional forces," Danilov warned.</p> <p>The British military estimated Thursday that Ukraine's counteroffensive in Kherson is "gathering momentum".</p> <p>"Their forces have highly likely established a bridgehead south of the Ingulets River, which forms the northern boundary of Russian-occupied Kherson," the British Defense Ministry said on Thursday.</p> <p>It added that Ukraine has used its new long-range artillery to damage at least three of the bridges across the Dnieper River, "which Russia relies upon to supply the areas under its control." The six-tenths-of-a-mile-long Antonivsky bridge, which Ukrainian forces struck on Wednesday, is likely to be "unusable," the British Defense Ministry concluded.</p>

	<p>Ukraine's presidential office said Thursday morning that Russian shelling of cities and villages over the past 24 hours killed at least five civilians, all of them in the eastern Donetsk region, and wounded nine more.</p> <p>Fighting in recent weeks has focused on the Donetsk region. It has intensified in recent days as Russian forces appeared to emerge from a reported "operational pause" after capturing the neighboring Luhansk region.</p> <p>A missile struck a residential building in Toretsk early Thursday morning, destroying two floors. "Missile terror again. We will not give up. ... We will not be intimidated," Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said on Telegram.</p> <p>Analysts with the Institute for the Study of War believe that Russian forces are focusing their efforts on capturing the cities of Bakhmut and Siversk in Donetsk province.</p> <p>"Russian forces have committed enough resources to conduct near-daily ground assaults and to seize territory on these two axes but have been unable to sustain a similar offensive operational tempo or to make similar territorial gains elsewhere in Ukraine," the Institute said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 US: 75,000 Russian forces killed or injured
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/07/27/world/russia-war-ukraine?smid=url-share#the-us-is-quietly-sharing-its-estimate-of-russian-war-casualties-more-than-75000-killed-or-injured
GIST	<p>The Biden administration is quietly circulating an estimate of Russian casualties in Ukraine that far exceeds earlier U.S. estimates, telling lawmakers that more than 75,000 members of Russia's forces had been killed or injured.</p> <p>A legislator who recently visited Ukraine confirmed on Wednesday that the estimate had emerged in a briefing from the State Department, Department of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Earlier in the day, a reporter for CNN tweeted the estimate and said it had been shared in a classified House briefing.</p> <p>Casualty estimates for militaries on both sides are highly speculative, U.S. officials have said. They often give ranges rather than specific numbers, though just last week, the C.I.A. director estimated that 60,000 Russian soldiers had been killed or injured. And some estimates have gone as high as 80,000 casualties.</p> <p>If the Biden administration's current estimate is accurate, it represents a staggering toll. Estimates of the number of Russian forces in Ukraine ranged as high as 150,000 in the spring, meaning roughly half could be out of action.</p> <p>Pentagon officials have said that losing just 10 percent of a military force, including both those killed and injured, renders a single unit unable to carry out combat-related tasks. Such losses also affect the morale and cohesion of a military unit.</p> <p>Throughout the war, Ukraine and Russia have shielded their casualty numbers, keeping one another, and the rest of the world, guessing about the depth of their losses. Both sides have an interest in underreporting battlefield losses: Russia to preserve its domestic narrative of success, and Ukraine, to maintain morale. Troop deaths and injuries have been mounting, given that fierce fighting has endured for months, but the Biden administration's estimate suggests just how high casualties may have gone on Russia's side.</p> <p>More recently, a senior adviser to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said that Ukrainian military casualties were now between 100 and 200 per day.</p>

Just weeks into the war, American officials offered what they said was a conservative estimate of more than 7,000 Russian war deaths so far — more than the number of American troops killed over 20 years in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. Russia followed with a far smaller count, saying on March 25 [that 1,351 of its troops had been killed](#). And President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said the same month that an estimated 1,300 Ukrainian soldiers had been [killed](#).

In May, Ukraine claimed that [30,000 Russian soldiers had been killed](#) since the invasion began in February, a number impossible to independently verify. In April, a British intelligence assessment put the estimated Russian losses at half that number.

Mr. Zelensky made a new claim in his nightly address on Tuesday, saying that almost 40,000 Russian soldiers had been killed since the start of the war, with tens of thousands more injured. That claim comports, in broad terms, with the U.S. estimate of about 75,000 Russian total casualties.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Study: smoking, vaping and risk from Covid
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/smoking-vaping-increases-risk-death-covid-study-finds/story?id=87483065
GIST	<p>Smokers and vapers are more likely to have a severe case of COVID-19 or die of the disease, a new study finds.</p> <p>People who reported use of tobacco products prior to their hospitalization were 39% more likely to be put on mechanical ventilation than non-smokers.</p> <p>What's more, they were 45% more likely to die.</p> <p>Although it's well-known that smoking and vaping damages the lungs and suppresses the immune system, making people more susceptible to COVID-19 and less likely to fight off the illness, there is limited information on the link between smoking and COVID-19 severity.</p> <p>"Like everybody else, we were very worried about COVID and trying to understand what are the important risk factors that predispose people for more severe outcomes," first author Dr. Aruni Bhatangar, a professor of medicine, biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of Louisville, told ABC News. "And we were concerned about if tobacco use may be affecting COVID severity, as well as outcomes."</p> <p>He added, "There's been a lot of work, a lot of observational work that's been done in the area with claims and counterclaims. Some people say smoking's bad, some people say not so bad. So we thought that we really did need a large, comprehensive study to address the issue."</p> <p>For the study, published in scientific journal PLOS One, the team looked at data from the American Heart Association COVID-19 Cardiovascular Disease registry including more than 4,000 people over age 18 who were hospitalized with COVID-19 between January 2020 and March 2021.</p> <p>People were classified as smokers if they reported current use of traditional cigarettes or e-cigarettes. However, the study did not evaluate if there was a difference in risk level between those who vape versus those who smoke.</p> <p>Researchers -- from the AHA Tobacco Regulation Center and the University of Louisville, in Kentucky -- found smoking or vaping were linked to more COVID-19 deaths and hospitalizations regardless of the patients' age, sex, race/ethnicity or medical history.</p> <p>Bhatangar said the risk estimates were a bit surprising and even "higher than we thought it would be."</p> <p>However, some subgroups were more likely to be at risk of death from COVID-19 than others.</p>

Smokers between ages 18 and 59 were more likely to die from the diseases than those who are age 60 and older, despite COVID's propensity to affect the elderly.

"That was a surprising finding and we thought about this part for a while, and it seems like maybe because the basal death rates in that age group were lower, so any risk factors are more likely to be pronounced than [in] people who are over 60 years old," Bhatangar said.

Additionally, white smokers had a higher risk of COVID death than Black and Hispanic patients, groups that have been disproportionately affected by the virus and its complications. However, Hispanic patients were more likely to be put on a ventilator.

Smoking was also linked to a higher risk of death among smokers with underlying conditions such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension and chronic kidney disease as well as those receiving anticoagulants before their hospitalization.

The team says its study has some limitations including lack of complete smoking history for participants and no information on how many cigarettes or other tobacco products the patients used per day or for how many years.

For future research, Bhatangar said he is interested in studying how smoking affects vaccine outcomes, whether smoking increases the risk of infection, the difference between current smokers and former smokers, and the same things among a larger vaping group.

"The obvious message is that if you're a smoker you do have a higher risk, [then] the general advice is always quit smoking altogether," he said. "But the more important part ... is with physicians and admitting hospitals, it is important to take medical history [into account] because maybe smokers are more likely to turn onto severe disease and may need more aggressive medical care because they are more likely to turn onto ventilators."

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HEADLINE	07/27 Anti-Iran protesters breach Iraq parliament
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/riot-police-repel-protesters-baghdads-green-zone-87492392
GIST	<p>BAGHDAD -- Hundreds of Iraqi protesters breached Baghdad's parliament Wednesday chanting anti-Iran curses in a demonstration against a nominee for prime minister by Iran-backed parties.</p> <p>The majority of the protesters were followers of influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. The demonstrators, all of them men, were seen walking on tables of the parliament floor, leafing through folders, sitting in the chairs of lawmakers and waving Iraqi flags. The incident raised the stakes in the political struggle for Iraq nearly 10 months after federal elections.</p> <p>No lawmakers were present. Only security forces were inside the building and they appeared to allow the protesters in with relative ease.</p> <p>The demonstrators were protesting the recent selection of Mohammed al-Sudani as the official nominee of the Coordination Framework bloc, a coalition led by Iran-backed Shiite parties and their allies.</p> <p>It was the largest protest since federal elections were held in October, and the second time al-Sadr has used his ability to mobilize masses to send a message to his political rivals this month. Earlier in July, thousands heeded his call for a mass prayer, an event many feared would devolve into destabilizing protests.</p> <p>Hours after his followers occupied parliament, al-Sadr issued a statement on Twitter telling them their message had been received, and "to return safely to your homes," signaling there would be no further escalation to the sit-in. Shortly after, protesters began making their way out of the parliament building with security forces supervising.</p>

The incident, and al-Sadr's subsequent show of control over his followers, carried an implicit warning to the Framework alliance of a potential escalation to come if the government forms with al-Sudani at the helm.

Al-Sadr's ability to mobilize and control his large grassroots following gives him powerful leverage over his rivals. In a similar fashion, his followers stormed the Green Zone in 2016 and entered the country's parliament building to demand political reform.

Earlier in the day, demonstrators breached Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, which houses the parliament and other government buildings, as well as foreign embassies.

Protesters chanted curses against Iran and said, "Sudani, out!"

Riot police had attempted to repel the protesters using water cannons, but demonstrators scaled the cement barrier walls and pulled down slabs using ropes to enter the Green Zone.

The demonstrators walked down the zone's main thoroughfare with little resistance from security forces. One security personnel was seen handing a protester a water bottle.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi called for calm and restraint, and for protesters to "immediately withdraw" from the area.

Al-Sadr recently stepped down from the political process despite having won the most seats in the October federal election. Protesters carried portraits of the cleric.

Al-Sudani was selected by State of Law leader and former premier Nouri al-Maliki. Before al-Sudani can face parliament to be seated officially as premier-designate, parties must first select a president. Protesters also chanted: "Maliki, garbage!"

The Framework, in a statement, said they had known of "calls urging chaos, stirring up strife," within the last 24 hours since nominating al-Sudani.

The United Nations said Iraqis had the right to protest but that it was "essential that demonstrations remain peaceful and comply with the law," in a statement.

Al-Sadr exited government formation talks after he was not able to corral enough lawmakers to get the majority required to elect Iraq's next president.

By replacing his lawmakers, the Framework leader pushed ahead to form next government. Many fear doing so also opens the doors to street protests organized by al-Sadr's large grass roots following and instability.

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HEADLINE	07/28 Japan lawmakers rare visit to Taiwan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/japan-discusses-regional-defense-rare-visit-taiwan-87532681
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan -- A group of Japanese lawmakers including two former defense ministers met with Taiwan's president on Thursday in a rare high-level visit to discuss regional security.</p> <p>The delegation, led by lawmaker and former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba, said it wanted to reach an agreement with Taiwan on defense issues and prepare for any potential conflict in the region, while also seeking to prevent conflict from breaking out.</p> <p>"We need to think ahead about what kind of situations could happen, what kind of laws and agreements we should prepare, and what kind of armaments we could use," he said in prepared remarks at the</p>

	<p>Presidential Office. “We need to work together to reach consensus on this ahead of anything that could happen.”</p> <p>Ishiba noted that Japan is also working closely with the U.S to prevent conflict in the Indo-Pacific, saying the defense allies “had no choice” but to prepare.</p> <p>Tensions in the region have risen amid increasing assertiveness from China, whose authoritarian ruling Communist Party considers democratic, self-ruling Taiwan its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.</p> <p>The group of Japanese lawmakers was welcomed by President Tsai Ing-wen and will also meet with Su Tseng-chang, president of the Executive Yuan, and representatives from Taiwan’s Defense Ministry.</p> <p>“Safeguarding Taiwan is not only about safeguarding sovereignty. It's also because on the issue of strategic safety Taiwan is a very critical line of defense of the first island chain," Tsai said. "We will continue to deepen our cooperation with Japan and other democratic partners to uphold the Indo-Pacific area's peace and stability.”</p> <p>Ishiba was accompanied by three other Japanese lawmakers — Yasukazu Hamada, Akihisa Nakashima and Takayuki Shimizu — who are all members of a cross-party national security group that is comprised of many who have served in the defense establishment.</p> <p>Ishiba said Japan had a responsibility to promote regional security, economic development and rule of law.</p> <p>“It cannot just be at the level of thought, just words spoken out of one's mouth. Japan must take on concrete responsibilities in the Asia region,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Australia forecast: high inflation next 2yrs
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/australia-forecasts-high-inflation-years-87533849
GIST	<p>CANBERRA, Australia -- Australia’s runaway inflation is forecast to remain too high for the next two years and economic growth will slow without falling into recession, the government’s treasurer said on Thursday.</p> <p>Treasurer Jim Chalmers outlined to Parliament how the country’s economic outlook has deteriorated since the government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese was elected in May.</p> <p>“The economy is growing, but so are the challenges,” Chalmers said. “Some are homegrown and others come at us from around the world.”</p> <p>Rising inflation and a global slowdown were key economic challenges.</p> <p>Inflation rose by 3.5% last year. It climbed 5.1% in the year through March and 6.1% in the year through June.</p> <p>Australia’s central bank is widely expected to boost its benchmark cash rate at its monthly board meeting next week for a fourth consecutive month. The rate is current 1.35%.</p> <p>Charmers said inflation was now expected to peak at 7.75% in the December quarter.</p> <p>“The current expectation is that it will get worse this year, moderate next year and normalize the year after that,” Chalmers said.</p> <p>Inflation was forecast to still be 5.5% mid next year before falling to an acceptable 2.75% in late 2024.</p>

	<p>The Reserve Bank of Australia changes interest rates to try to keep inflation within a target band of 2% and 3%.</p> <p>Before the election, inflation had been forecast to peak at 4.25%.</p> <p>Economic data for the last fiscal year that ended on June 30 has not yet been finalized, but growth was expected to come in half a percentage point lower than previously forecast, at 3.75%.</p> <p>Treasury Department growth forecasts for the current fiscal year and next year have each been downgraded by 50 basis points to 3.5% and 3%, respectively.</p> <p>“The headwinds that our economy is facing, higher inflation at the top of that list along with ... slowing global growth, are now reflected in the revised economic outcomes and forecasts,” Chalmers said.</p> <p>Higher inflation and slower growth were expected to cost the government an additional 30 billion Australian dollars (\$21 billion) over the next four years than had been previously forecast.</p> <p>Chalmers said neither the Treasury Department nor the independent Reserve Bank had forecast an Australian recession.</p> <p>The government plans to ease cost of living pressures on Australians by reducing childcare costs for 1.26 million families, promoting wage growth and improving clogged supply chains, Chalmers said</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Russia, West vie for influence in Africa
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/cold-war-russia-west-vie-influence-africa-87533848
GIST	<p>JOHANNESBURG -- Russian, French and American leaders are crisscrossing Africa to win support for their positions on the war in Ukraine, waging what some say is the most intense competition for influence on the continent since the Cold War.</p> <p>Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and French President Emanuel Macron are each visiting several African countries this week. Samantha Power, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, went to Kenya and Somalia last week. The U.S. ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfield, will go to Ghana and Uganda next week.</p> <p>“It's like a new Cold War is playing out in Africa, where the rival sides are trying to gain influence,” said William Gumede, director of Democracy Works, a foundation promoting good governance.</p> <p>Lavrov, in his travels across the drought- and hunger-stricken continent, has sought to portray the West as the villain, blaming it for rising food prices, while the Western leaders have accused the Kremlin of cynically using food as a weapon and waging an imperial-style war of conquest — words calculated to appeal to listeners in post-colonial Africa.</p> <p>Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has been working to win support in Africa for several years, reinvigorating friendships that date back a half-century, when the Soviet Union backed many African movements fighting to end colonial rule.</p> <p>"Now that campaign has gone into high gear," Gumede said.</p> <p>Moscow's influence in Africa was on display in March during the U.N. vote to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While 28 African nations voted in favor of the resolution, a significant minority of countries on the continent — 25 — either voted to abstain or did not vote at all.</p>

Russia's top diplomat this week visited Egypt, Congo, Uganda and Ethiopia, pledging friendship and charging the U.S. and European countries with driving up food prices by pursuing "reckless" environmental policies. He also accused them of hoarding food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The situation in Ukraine did additionally negatively affect food markets, but not due to the Russian special operation, rather due to the absolutely inadequate reaction of the West, which announced sanctions," Lavrov said in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

Lavrov was warmly received in Uganda by President Yoweri Museveni, who for years has been a U.S. ally but has refused to criticize Russia over the invasion. Museveni even suggested at the outbreak of the war that Putin's actions might be understandable because Ukraine is in Russia's sphere of influence.

Lavrov voiced support for reform of the U.N. Security Council to give African countries permanent seats and greater influence.

Appearing with Lavrov, the Ugandan leader spoke fondly of old ties with Russia, asking how he could spurn Moscow when he has good relations with countries that participated in slavery.

Museveni, an opinion leader on the continent who has held power for three decades, is an obvious choice for Russia as someone to strengthen ties with, said Ugandan political analyst Asuman Bisiika.

"Uganda is the center of gravity in East Africa," Bisiika said.

Museveni, 77, has been strictly wearing a mask in public since the COVID-19 outbreak. But he did not have one on when greeting Lavrov in front of photographers, apparently wanting to show warmth to the Russian. Museveni had a mask back on in his next public appearance a day later.

Russia is also courting African public opinion through its state television network, RT, formerly known as Russia Today. RT has announced that it will open a new bureau in Johannesburg.

RT was abruptly removed from Africa's biggest pay-TV platform in Africa, Johannesburg-based Multichoice, in March after the European Union and Britain imposed sanctions against Russia. It is not clear whether establishing the new bureau will enable RT to resume broadcasts to Africa through Multichoice, which claims nearly 22 million subscribers on the continent.

"For Russia, it is the battle to be heard in Africa. It is not important for the actual war effort but for their long-term political influence," Anton Harber, professor of journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. "They see it as fertile ground to cultivate their influence, and, of course, votes in the U.N. are important."

On his tour of Africa, France's Macron accused the Kremlin of using TV channels like RT to spread propaganda in support of the war. And he charged the Kremlin with blackmailing the world by thwarting the export of grain from Ukraine.

"They are blackmailing because they are the ones who blocked cereals in Ukraine. They are the ones who regulate their cereals," he said in Benin. His itinerary also included Cameroon and Guinea-Bissau.

Macron appealed to Africans to side against Russia.

"I'm telling you here in Africa, a continent that has suffered from colonial imperialism: Russia is one of the last colonial, imperial powers. She decides to invade a neighboring country to defend her interests," he said. "That's the reality."

Power, the top U.S. AID official, was in East Africa to pledge aid to help the region's fight against hunger amid a devastating multi-year drought. She did not hold back in criticizing Russia.

	“By blockading Ukraine’s grain exports and restricting the trade of Russia’s own fertilizer, Putin’s actions have had the consequence of inflicting pain on the people of Kenya and on other countries throughout the world,” Power said in Nairobi. “He is hurting the people of Kenya in order to benefit his own situation.”
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HEADLINE	07/27 Fed another hefty interest rate hike
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2022-07-27/fed-battling-to-tamp-down-inflation-gears-up-to-make-another-big-interest-rate-hike
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — In the most aggressive back-to-back interest rate increases since the early 1980s economic crisis, the Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced another hike of three-quarters of a percentage point and signaled more to come in its effort to beat back inflation despite the risk of a recession.</p> <p>The Fed’s hefty increase in its benchmark rate, which will mean higher interest rates on credit cards, home and auto loans and other such purchases, seeks to curb the strong consumer demand and spending that have been a major factor in driving up prices.</p> <p>Fed Chairman Jerome H. Powell, at a news conference after the interest rate announcement, said the economy is clearly slowing, with consumer activity, business investment and housing markets all softening. But noting the still-robust job growth, he said that he doesn’t think the U.S. is in a recession and that the Fed plans to keep raising interest rates over the next several months to tamp down inflation, although at a slower pace.</p> <p>Stock markets rose significantly, with the Dow Jones industrial average gaining 1.4% and the broader Standard & Poor’s 500 index closing 2.6% higher.</p> <p>The central bank’s efforts will also have profound implications that go beyond the U.S. and global economies.</p> <p>As the Fed tries to put the brakes on inflation without skidding the country into a recession, it is intensifying political problems for both Democrats and Republicans ahead of the November congressional elections.</p> <p>Both parties, but especially Democrats, could face voters’ ire if prices keep rising in the months ahead or a downturn leads to job losses and other unwelcome consequences.</p> <p>If there are bright spots for President Biden and his party, it’s that gas prices have come off their highs in June and there’s positive news in an economic indicator that most Americans don’t usually pay much attention to: the value of the dollar against foreign currencies.</p> <p>One offshoot of the Fed’s rate-increase campaign has been a surge in the dollar in recent months, which is making products from Europe, Asia and other parts of the world cheaper for American buyers.</p> <p>Because the U.S. purchases trillions of dollars in imported products each year — including a wide array of things such as clothing, electronics, flowers and fresh vegetables — the stronger dollar is starting to make it a little easier for many shoppers to deal with inflation for some goods.</p> <p>“That’s one of the very few forces working against food price inflation,” said Ricky Volpe, an agribusiness professor at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, noting persistent food supply challenges involving labor, weather, transportation and energy.</p> <p>In June the cost to U.S. consumers for food produced at home was 12.2% more than a year earlier. That helped push up overall inflation to 9.1%, a four-decade high. Prices for cereals, breads, eggs, milk and poultry products have been rising even faster in recent months. By comparison, prices for imported foods, including vegetables and fish, have been trending down lately.</p>

Carl Tannenbaum, chief economist at Northern Trust, said cheaper imports should provide a relatively small but meaningful amount of help in lowering the rate of U.S. inflation as more companies pass on those savings to consumers.

The downside for American multinational corporations is that their exports and sales overseas will take a hit.

And the rapid and sharp gain in the dollar, Tannenbaum said, is inflicting real pain on some developing countries as they face bigger dollar payments for debt and commodities. The recent political turmoil in Sri Lanka reflected a severe economic crisis that included a shortage of dollars and a national currency that has now plunged more than 80% against the greenback.

Still, for American voters, a decline in import prices, along with companies such as Walmart now starting to mark down merchandise because of excess inventory and slowing demand, could provide some relief from the decades-high inflation.

Jack Ablin, chief investment officer at Cresset Capital, said he thinks inflation may have peaked in June and July. One indication is that regular gas prices nationally averaged \$4.30 a gallon Wednesday, down from \$4.90 a month earlier, according to the American Automobile Assn. In California it was \$5.69 a gallon, compared with \$6.32 a month ago.

“There’s growing evidence that consumers’ willingness and ability to spend is getting tired,” he said in a note to clients. “Moreover, households appear to have spent through their pandemic-supported cash hoard, as evidenced by a recent run-up in credit card debt and AT&T’s acknowledgement that an increasing number of their customers’ bills are past due.”

On Thursday, the government is expected to release data showing the U.S. economy declined in the second quarter, after earlier reports of shrinking activity in the first three months of the year. Republicans are likely to jump all over the news, as consecutive quarters of falling real gross domestic product, or economic output, are commonly seen as evidence of a recession.

An official determination of a recession is based on an array of data, and most economists, agreeing with Powell, say that although two negative quarters of GDP might constitute a “technical recession,” the U.S. doesn’t appear to be in an outright downturn. Employment thus far has held up well, and the picture of the American consumer, whose spending accounts for two-thirds of economic activity, is somewhat mixed.

GDP in the current quarter, as it looks now, appears lackluster. And what happens over the rest of the summer and beyond will depend at least in part on what the Fed does and how people react to its efforts to get inflation under control.

The Fed’s rate increase Wednesday is the fourth this year and lifts its benchmark rate to nearly 2.5%, a level that’s considered neutral — that is, neither stimulative nor restrictive to the economy.

The question now is, how much higher will the central bank go?

Powell said Wednesday that for now, the best guide is the Fed’s last forecast, released June 15, when policymakers on average projected their main rate would end the year at nearly 3.5% and rise an additional one-half percentage point next year.

The Fed has three more scheduled policy meetings this year. The next one is Sept. 20 and 21, when officials will offer updated economic and interest rate projections. Financial markets have been betting that the Fed will lift rates an additional percentage point this year but then reverse course in 2023.

What happens to employment figures to be a key determinant in the Fed’s decision-making. As interest rates rise and the economy cools, Powell and his colleagues expect the labor market to slow from its very

	<p>tight condition. But they don't want the jobless rate, currently near a 50-year low of 3.6%, to rise too much either.</p> <p>"Our goal is to bring inflation down and have a so-called soft landing ... that doesn't require a really significant increase in unemployment," Powell said, acknowledging that "it's gotten more challenging over recent months."</p> <p>There also are a number of other factors that will influence inflation and growth, which remain highly uncertain and are largely beyond the Fed's control, including the war in Ukraine, the global economic situation and pandemic lockdowns in China.</p> <p>Supply chain problems at ports and in other parts of the logistics system have eased somewhat in recent weeks, but there's still a shortage of some parts and goods, particularly for new autos. Such imbalances have pushed up inflation.</p> <p>And it will take time before the backlog of orders is cleared and companies adjust to shifting supply chains, said Shawn DuBravac, an economist and president of Avrio Institute, a consulting firm. But, he said, with demand slowing and inventories of goods such as apparel relatively high, many more businesses don't have the pricing power they had at the start of the year.</p> <p>In recent days, some of the biggest companies — including Microsoft, General Motors, Alphabet and Walmart — have reported lower profits. And companies in finance, housing and other sectors have cut their outlook and are shedding jobs.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Americans flood Mexico City; locals fed up
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-07-27/americans-are-flooding-mexico-city-some-mexicans-want-them-to-go-home
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — Leer en español</p> <p>Fernando Bustos Gorozpe was sitting with friends in a cafe here when he realized that — once again — they were outnumbered.</p> <p>"We're the only brown people," said Bustos, a 38-year-old writer and university professor. "We're the only people speaking Spanish except the waiters."</p> <p>Mexico has long been the top foreign travel destination for Americans, its bountiful beaches and picturesque pueblos luring tens of millions of U.S. visitors annually. But in recent years, a growing number of tourists and remote workers — hailing from Brooklyn, N.Y., Silicon Valley and points in between — have flooded the nation's capital and left a scent of new-wave imperialism.</p> <p>The influx, which has accelerated since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and is likely to continue as inflation rises, is transforming some of the city's most treasured neighborhoods into expat enclaves.</p> <p>In leafy, walkable quarters such as Roma, Condesa, Centro and Juarez, rents are soaring as Americans and other foreigners snap up houses and landlords trade long-term renters for travelers willing to pay more on Airbnb. Taquerias, corner stores and <i>fondas</i> — small, family-run lunch spots — are being replaced by Pilates studios, co-working spaces and sleek cafes advertising oat-milk lattes and avocado toast.</p> <p>And English — well, it's everywhere: ringing out at supermarkets, natural wine bars and fitness classes in the park.</p> <p>At Lardo, a Mediterranean restaurant where, on any given night, three-quarters of the tables are filled with foreigners, a Mexican man in a well-cut suit recently took a seat at the bar, gazed at the English-language menu before him and sighed as he handed it back: "A menu in Spanish, please."</p>

Some *chilangos*, as locals are known, are fed up.

Recently, expletive-laced posters appeared around town.

“New to the city? Working remotely?” they read in English. “You’re a f—ing plague and the locals f—ing hate you. Leave.”

That sentiment echoed the hundreds of responses that poured in after a young American posted this seemingly innocuous tweet: “Do yourself a favor and remote work in Mexico City — it is truly magical.”

“Please don’t,” read one of the kinder replies. “This city is becoming more and more expensive every day in part because of people like you, and you don’t even realize or care about it.”

Hugo Van der Merwe, 31 — a video game designer who grew up in Florida and Namibia and has spent the last several months working remotely from Mexico City, Montreal and Bogota, Colombia — said he understands why locals are vexed by the growing population of “digital nomads.”

“There’s a distinction between people who want to learn about the place they are in and those who just like it because it’s cheap,” he said. “I’ve met a number of people who don’t really care that they’re in Mexico, they just care that it’s cheap.”

Clear financial incentives are drawing Americans to Mexico City — where the average local salary is \$450 a month.

For the cost of a \$2,000 one-bedroom in Koreatown, an Angeleno can rent a penthouse here.

Despite growing tensions, Mexico City is not Paris, where an American stumbling over French in a boulangerie will get a dose of hostility along with her croissants. It’s not [Berlin](#) or Barcelona, where locals in recent years have mounted major protests over excessive tourism and the gobbling up of urban properties by global investment firms.

The vast majority of people in this crowded, colorful metropolis are unwaveringly kind and patient with international visitors, who in the first four months of this year spent \$851 million on hotels alone, according to tourism records.

But there is friction beneath the surface, as more locals consider what gentrification means for the city’s economics, culture and even race relations.

Over the weekend, a tenant advocacy group hosted a walking tour of “places we have lost to gentrification, touristification and forced displacement.”

“Our homes,” the event flier read, “now house digital nomads.”

The dynamic playing out here is, in many ways, an old-world problem colliding with tech-age mobility, one that is forcing Mexico to confront its own history and traits.

After his revelation at the cafe, Bustos uploaded a video to his popular TikTok account, complaining that the influx of foreigners in Mexico City “stinks of modern colonialism.” Nearly 2,000 people posted comments in agreement.

His critique is multilayered and speaks to generations of injustices. There’s the problem of newcomers’ “indifference as to how their actions are affecting locals,” he said, but also the fact that Mexicans cannot migrate to the U.S. with the same ease. He also believes that Americans, many of whom are white, are reinforcing the city’s pervasive — if infrequently discussed — caste system.

Indigenous Mexicans are more likely to be poor than lighter-skinned Mexicans and are largely unrepresented in film, television and advertisements. A growing social movement called Poder Prieto (“Brown Power”) has demanded that Netflix, HBO and other streaming platforms [feature dark-skinned actors](#).

“Mexico is classist and racist,” Bustos said. “People with white skin are given preference. Now, if a local wants to go to a restaurant or a club, they don’t just have to compete with rich, white Mexicans but with foreigners too.”

Greater Mexico City’s 3,000 square miles are ringed by mountains and home to 21 million people. Most Americans stick to a few neighborhoods in the center, some of which were first gentrified by Mexicans. After the 1985 earthquake devastated neighborhoods in and around downtown, middle-class residents fled by the hundreds of thousands to areas on the city’s periphery that they deemed safer.

In Roma and Condesa, artists lured by cheap rents moved in, turning the area into a creative and intellectual hub.

The flood of American visitors began in earnest around 2016, when the New York Times [named](#) Mexico City the world’s top travel destination, and magazine writers wondered whether it was the “[new Berlin](#).” International artists, chefs and designers arrived, scooping up inexpensive studio spaces, opening restaurants and integrating themselves into the city’s imaginative nightlife.

The pandemic pushed it into overdrive. As much of Europe and Asia shut their doors to Americans in 2020, Mexico, which adopted few COVID-19 restrictions, was one of the few places where gringos were welcome.

Making it easier: Americans have long been able to stay here up to six months without a visa.

The State Department says there are 1.6 million U.S. citizens living in Mexico, although it doesn’t know how many are based in the capital. Mexican census data track only foreigners who have applied for residency, and most remote workers don’t.

But the anecdotal evidence is compelling. In the first four months of the year, 1.2 million foreigners arrived at Mexico City’s airport. Alexandra Demou, who runs the relocation company Welcome Home Mexico, said she gets 50 calls a week from people contemplating a move.

“We’re just seeing Americans flooding in,” she said. “It’s people who maybe have their own business, or maybe they’re thinking of starting some consulting or freelance work. They don’t even know how long they’re going to stay. They’re completely picking up their entire lives and just moving down here.” There is plenty to love about Mexico City.

Wide, tree-lined boulevards call to mind the capitals of Europe and each Sunday are closed to cars and filled with bicyclists. A hodgepodge of architecture — Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Modernist — stitch together in artful ways.

And the food is superb: Street vendors sell spit-grilled al pastor pork tacos, delicate quesadillas stuffed with squash blossoms and stewed corn topped with mayonnaise and lime — sometimes all on the same block.

Sarah Lupton, a 35-year-old from North Carolina who came to Mexico City last year, as soon as she got her second COVID-19 vaccine, said she fell in love with the “romantic yet gritty” aesthetic. She ended up selling her video production company and relocating here in January with her Shih Tzu. Now she’s learning Spanish, applying for residency and exploring a new path as a life and career coach.

“I came for a new set of possibilities for how I experience my life and what I get to create in it,” she said. “I feel like this city has everything I need to build a life of creativity, connection, adventure and stability.”

Lauren Rodwell, 40, also moved down in January after spending several months here last year.

A marketer who works a tech job that is remote, she was tired of living in San Francisco, where every conversation began with, “What do you do?”

“I like being in vibrant cities that have multiple cultures that mix well, where there’s good food and good energy and dancing and art,” she said. “It reminds me of being in a more friendly, more clean at times, Brooklyn.”

Lupton and Rodwell both said they are sensitive to concerns about gentrification. In San Francisco, Rodwell lived in the Mission, a neighborhood that became emblematic of the sweeping change wrought by the tech industry there.

“I try and frequent local businesses and not go with the big conglomerates,” said Rodwell. “I try to give money back to my community and be involved in my community.”

Rodwell, who is Black, said she doesn’t feel guilty.

“I kind of feel like, as a person of color from America, I’m so economically disadvantaged that wherever I go and experience some advantage or equity, I take it,” she said.

In Mexico, which has a relatively small population of Afro-Mexicans and abolished slavery decades before its northern neighbor, Rodwell said she does not experience the same racism as she does in the U.S.. “Being Black in America,” she said, is exhausting. “It’s nice to take a break from it.”

Much of the criticism in the growing debate about foreigners comes down to economic inequality.

“Americans can come here, and they can afford everything and live like kings and queens,” said Dan Defossey, an American who moved to Mexico a dozen years ago and owns a popular barbecue joint. But they need to understand, he said, that “Mexico is not cheap for Mexicans.”

Omar Euroza, a barista at a coffee shop in Roma, said rent for his apartment in the city’s historic center, another place where foreigners are flocking, has more than doubled over the last five years. Nearby, renters have been pushed out as entire buildings are turned into upscale apartments.

A recent study showed that Mexico City residents spend an average of 60% of their income on housing, and nearly a third of residents moved during the pandemic, the majority because they couldn’t afford rent.

Euroza said he was sick of feeling like an outsider in his city. Around 60%-70% of his clients are foreigners, he said.

“Some people order in English and get mad when I don’t understand them.”

A chef who had just taken a sheet of warm cookies out of the oven shook his head.

“That’s unfair,” he said. “If we go to the U.S., we’re expected to speak English.”

There is a growing movement to help newcomers understand the impact they’re having — such as a poster campaign that, during the peak of the pandemic, coaxed foreigners to mask up. “Dear guests, we are genuinely happy you’re vaccinated,” the posters read. “Please consider that many of us are not.”

Some Mexicans aren’t unhappy about the American inundation, like Sandra Hernández, a real estate agent who said all of the recent deals she has closed have involved Americans. They mostly want houses or apartments in the Art Deco style, she said, and are all willing to pay the asking price.

Ted Rossano Jr., whose parents two decades ago opened a taco stand in Centro, said income from foreigners has helped save the business, which suffered during the pandemic. Ricos Tacos Toluca is a stop on several of the “taco tours” that have emerged in recent years, and he said foreigners now supply about 15% of the stand’s revenue.

“It’s cool. We’re proud of it,” Rossano said. “Who would have thought that a simple business like this would get international recognition?”

On a recent afternoon, three Americans and a Brit were contentedly munching the stand’s famous green chorizo tacos as their guide, Tyler Hansbrough, explained the chef’s handiwork.

“See, she has to render all that,” he said, as Rossano’s mom moved chorizo around a griddle.

Hansbrough taught Spanish at a San Francisco high school before moving here in 2016. He married a Mexican man and opened Tyler’s Taco Tours to show visitors authentic Mexican food — not the upscale stuff they might find in restaurants in Roma or Condesa.

He has been struck by the number of remote workers flooding in and worries that they are different. The nature of their jobs means they don’t necessarily have to learn Spanish or integrate into Mexican society, he said. It allows a certain aloofness that wasn’t possible a few years ago.

“So many people come here and think, ‘Oh, Mexico City is so cheap. I could move here.’ And they are. They’re renting my Airbnb for months at a time,” he said. “But I’m starting to be worried. It’s great for business, but it’s also kind of scaring me.”

As his group finished the tacos and ventured into the cacophonous city for their next meal, another taco tour sidled up to Rossano’s stand.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Hamas raises taxes in impoverished Gaza
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/seeking-funds-hamas-raises-taxes-impoverished-gaza-87533069
GIST	<p>GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip -- Gaza’s Hamas rulers have imposed a slew of new taxes on imported clothes and office supplies just ahead of the new school year, sparking limited but rare protests in the impoverished coastal strip.</p> <p>The move by the militant group comes at a time when Gaza’s 2.3 million people are suffering not only from a 15-year Israeli-Egyptian blockade, but also from a new jump in prices caused by global supply-chain issues and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>“This is a wrong, oppressive decision that destroys the national economy,” said Nahed al-Sawada, who imports clothes from China and Turkey.</p> <p>A list by the Ministry of Economy includes planned taxes on items like packaged nuts, with an import tariff of 2,000 shekels (nearly \$600) per ton. In the past, nuts were imported tax free. The tariff on a ton of toilet paper rose from \$90 to \$580. The taxes are set to go into effect on Aug. 1.</p> <p>The list also includes a tax of about \$3 on pair of jeans, and \$230 on a ton of plastic folders used to store papers. Demand for these items increases ahead of the school year.</p> <p>Emad Abdelhadi, a representative for Gaza’s union of clothes’ merchants, said a new pair of jeans sells for \$3 to \$10, and the new tax will pose an unfair burden on struggling consumers.</p> <p>In a territory suffering from rampant poverty and unemployment approaching 50%, he said many Gazans already look for used clothes. The new taxes, he said, “will deprive them of the ability to buy.”</p>

Gaza's economy has been hit hard by the Israeli-Egyptian blockade, imposed when Hamas seized power in 2007. Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent Hamas from arming, but critics say the restrictions, which include tight limits on exports, amount to collective punishment.

Hamas' government is not internationally recognized and Israel and its Western allies consider the group, which opposes Israel's existence and has in the past staged deadly suicide bombings against Israelis, a terrorist organization.

Israel and Hamas have fought four wars since the Hamas takeover, further straining the territory's rundown infrastructure. Electricity is in short supply, tap water undrinkable and the health care system is in shambles.

With tens of thousands of civil servants to support, as well as its heavy spending on its military wing, it is no surprise that Hamas is seeking new sources of revenue. Still, the timing is questionable, coming at a time when the Russian invasion of Ukraine has driven up consumer prices worldwide.

Hamas authorities say the new taxes are meant to protect the local industries. But experts and business people challenge this argument, since badly needed raw materials are now being taxed.

Mohammed Abu Jayyab, an economist, said the taxes have failed to protect local manufacturers because the government still taxes raw materials and production lines.

A spokesman for the Economy Ministry did not return requests for comment.

Hamas doesn't release figures on its funding resources or budgets, but the latest steps are part of a series of taxes targeting a wide array of sectors, from street vendors selling hot drinks to restaurants, home building and cars.

The government offers few services in exchange, and most aid and relief projects are covered by the international community. The funds help Hamas operate a government and powerful armed wing.

Protests against Hamas are rare and often met by force. But earlier this month, about two dozen members of the clothes merchants' union expressed their frustration in public. They stood inside the building housing their union in Gaza City and held new pairs of jeans, with the price tags still on them, in the air for about half an hour.

Two days later, the merchants gathered outside the offices of Hamas lawmakers. Police prevented the media from filming and ordered the protest to stop after allowing representatives of the union inside to talk to the lawmakers. The protest ended peacefully.

"The lawmakers acknowledged the taxes were high, and said they will look into it," said Abdelhadi, the union representative.

But he said he did not expect a positive outcome. "By these decisions, they have issued a death sentence against the industry."

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HEADLINE	07/27 Arms dealer in exchange for 2 Americans?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/viktor-bout-convicted-arms-dealer-held-us-prison/story?id=86543907
GIST	<p>Shortly after U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officers finally arrested him in a hotel in Thailand in 2008, Viktor Bout turned to one of the agents escorting him and said, "I guess the game is over."</p> <p>Bout was arguably the world's best-known illegal arms trafficker and his capture was the end of a nearly decade-long hunt by the U.S. to stop him.</p>

Now, 14 years since his arrest and jailing, Bout is back in play. Three sources confirmed to ABC News on Wednesday [that the U.S. has proposed exchanging him](#) for two Americans held captive by Moscow: the WNBA star Brittney Griner and the former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan. (CNN [was first to report](#) this plan.)

Bout, 55, emerged as a kingpin in the global illegal arms trade during the 1990s, accused of fueling some of the world's bloodiest conflicts, particularly in Africa. Sourcing weapons from the huge stockpiles of the collapsed Soviet Union, the Russian used a fleet of Soviet-built transport aircraft to supply vast quantities of arm, often circumventing international embargoes.

"There's a lot of armed traffickers out there," said Rob Zachariasiewicz, a now retired DEA agent who helped lead the team that arrested Bout in Thailand. "The difference with Mr. Bout was he owned his own fleet of private aircraft. People can argue: Was he the biggest arms trafficker? I look at him as one of the biggest arms transporters."

Bout eventually came to be seen as the world's biggest weapons smuggler. The media dubbed him the "Merchant of Death" and in 2006, he inspired the movie "Lord of War," which starred Nicholas Cage.

The U.S. government began trying to disrupt Bout's operations at the end of the 1990s by sanctioning his companies. He was finally captured in a DEA sting. Bout agreed to supply anti-aircraft missiles to undercover DEA operatives posing as members of the Columbian militant group, the FARC, that they claimed would be used against American forces. The DEA seized Bout during a meeting to discuss the phony deal in a hotel in Thailand.

Bout was extradited to the U.S. on narco-terrorism charges and in 2011 was convicted of conspiring to kill Americans, to supply anti-aircraft missiles and of aiding a terrorist organization. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

From the moment of Bout's arrest, Russia began substantial efforts to free him, first trying to block his extradition and later campaigning for his release.

"He clearly was very important. And it's my understanding that President [Vladimir] Putin himself was involved in trying to get him home," said Zachariasiewicz, the former DEA agent.

U.S. officials feared Moscow tried to corrupt Thai authorities to prevent Bout's extradition -- at one point, Zachariasiewicz learned that a Thai court had even mysteriously issued an arrest warrant for him, preventing him from traveling to the country. Zachariasiewicz said Bout later told him the warrant was "just business."

Russia's determination to free Bout has raised questions. Both U.S. officials involved in Bout's capture and independent researchers have long believed Bout has links to the Russian security services. Some point to his education at the Military Institute of Foreign Languages, in Moscow, reputed as a training ground for spies.

Bout himself denies the claims as a smear tactic. He also rejects the charges against him, saying he is the victim of a DEA entrapment plot.

But Russia previously made clear it was interested in an exchange for Bout.

Zachariasiewicz said he believes Russia now wants Bout back mainly to make a political statement, given his intelligence value is likely long since exhausted. But he opposes trading the man he helped arrest, saying it risks encouraging hostile governments to take more Americans hostage.

But Trevor Reed, the former U.S. Marine who was freed from Russian detention in a prisoner swap in May, has called for the Biden administration to make the trade.

	<p>"Viktor Bout has already been in prison for 15 years," Reed told ABC in May after his release. "He's no longer a threat."</p> <p>Reed said he disagreed that freeing Bout would encourage more hostage-takings, saying governments like Russia are seizing Americans regardless.</p> <p>Supporters of trading Bout have pointed out the judge who jailed Bout has said she believes the sentence, which was dictated by mandatory sentencing rules, was excessive. Reed notes Bout could potentially be up for release in five years anyway.</p> <p>"To leave Americans there and say, 'Well, we're not gonna negotiate. We're not gonna do exchanges with this government,' that's just completely pointless because you change nothing there. They're still gonna kidnap Americans," said Reed.</p> <p>"I don't care if it's 100 Victor Bouts. They have to get our guys out," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Fed chair: US not yet in recession
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/us-recession-takeaways-fed-87531722
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON -- Jerome Powell delivered a tough message at the start of a news conference Wednesday: Inflation is way too high, and the Federal Reserve is laser-focused on taming it with higher borrowing costs.</p> <p>Yet despite his resolute words, the Fed chair also said for the first time that the central bank's actions are already having an effect on the economy in ways that could slow the worst inflation the nation has endured in four decades.</p> <p>With the Fed's benchmark interest rate now at a level that's believed to neither stimulate nor restrain growth, Powell said the pace of rate hikes could slow in the coming months. And he pointed to signs that many businesses are having an easier time filling jobs, a trend that would limit pay increases and potentially slow inflation.</p> <p>"There were some hints that we're closer to the end than the beginning" of the Fed's efforts to tighten credit, said Michael Feroli, an economist at JPMorgan Chase and a former Fed staffer.</p> <p>Powell's suggestion that the Fed could moderate its future rate hikes after it announced a three-quarter-point hike Wednesday — its second in a row of that substantial size — helped touch off a celebratory rally in the stock market, with the S&P 500 jumping 2.6% and the tech-heavy Nasdaq rocketing 4.1%, its biggest gain in more than two years.</p> <p>Some economists didn't share the market's optimism. They noted that Powell kept the door open to another big rate increase when the Fed next meets in September. The Fed chair also indicated that even if the economy were to fall into a recession, the central bank would keep raising rates if it deemed that necessary to curb still-high inflation.</p> <p>When asked at his news conference whether a recession would alter the Fed's course of rate hikes, Powell said simply, "We're going to be focused on getting inflation back down."</p> <p>Here are five takeaways from the Fed's interest-rate setting policy meeting and Powell news conference:</p> <hr/> <p>POWELL: U.S. NOT IN RECESSION</p>

A slew of recent data has signaled the economy is weakening. Economists are increasingly forecasting a recession for later this year or in 2023. Powell, though, pointed Wednesday to the robust labor market as evidence the economy isn't in recession, at least not yet.

Employers, he noted, added 2.7 million jobs in the first half of the year, the 3.6% U.S. unemployment rate is near a 50-year low and wage growth is strong.

“It doesn’t make sense that the economy could be in recession with this kind of thing happening,” the Fed chair said.

JOBS OVER GDP

On Thursday, the government will estimate second-quarter gross domestic product, the broadest measure of the nation's output of goods and services. Some economists think the GDP report will show that the economy contracted for a second straight quarter, which would meet an informal definition of recession.

But even if it does, the definition of recession that is most widely accepted is the one determined by the National Bureau of Economic Research, a group of economists whose Business Cycle Dating Committee defines a recession as “a significant decline in economic activity that is spread across the economy and lasts more than a few months.”

Powell also noted that the government's estimate of quarterly GDP is often significantly revised later and that the initial reports on economic growth should be taken with “a grain of salt.”

The Fed chair did sound a cautionary note, pointing out that there are signs that momentum in the job market is easing. Job openings have declined modestly, more people are seeking unemployment aid and hiring is lower than it was at the start of the year.

SLOWER GROWTH, HIRING GOOD

But even those signs of a slightly weaker job market are not all bad news, at least from the Fed's perspective.

The Fed wants to cool the economy through its rate hikes, which make home mortgages, auto loans and business borrowing more expensive. As consumers and businesses spend less, the resulting pullback in demand can bring inflation down closer to the Fed's 2% annual target.

“We think it’s necessary to have growth slow down, and growth is going to be slowing this year,” Powell said.

HOW HIGH WILL RATES GO?

Since early this year, the Fed has steadily ratcheted up its forecasts for how fast and how high it would have to raise rates to conquer inflation. On Wednesday, though, Powell said that estimates that Fed policymakers made a month ago for where rates would go next was still the best guide.

In June officials projected that the Fed's key rate would reach between 3.25% and 3.5% at the end of this year, which Powell said was a “moderately restrictive” level. And at least two additional rate hikes were forecast for next year.

For the Fed to meet that year-end target would involve a half-point increase in September, and two quarter-point hikes in November and December. Such increases would represent a much more modest pace than the 2.25 percentage points of hikes the Fed has now carried out in just the past four meetings, the fastest pace since the early 1980s.

THE FED ISN'T ALONE

Other major central banks around the world have also been imposing big rate increases to combat inflation, which has spiked in nearly all advanced economies.

The European Union raised its short-term rate by a half-point last week. Canada's central bank announced a full percentage point increase earlier this month. Last month, the Swiss National Bank implemented a half-point hike, its first increase in 15 years.

Although higher rates around the world could help throttle inflation, they also carry the threat of causing a global economic slowdown.

This week, the International Monetary Fund downgraded its outlook for world economic growth to 3.2% this year. That was down from a 3.6% estimate in April and much slower than last year's 6.1% pace.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Canada: Pope's apology is not enough
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/canada-popes-apology-indigenous-87522490
GIST	<p>QUEBEC CITY -- The Canadian government made clear Wednesday that Pope Francis' apology to Indigenous peoples for abuses in the country's church-run residential schools didn't go far enough, suggesting that reconciliation over the fraught history is still very much a work in progress.</p> <p>The official government reaction came as Francis arrived in Quebec City for meetings with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Governor General Mary Simon at her Quebec residence, the hilltop Citadelle fortress, on the second leg of Francis' week-long visit to Canada.</p> <p>The government's criticisms echo those of some survivors and concern Francis' omission of any reference to the sexual abuse suffered by Indigenous children in the schools, as well as his original reluctance to name the Catholic Church as an institution bearing responsibility.</p> <p>Francis has said he is on a "penitential pilgrimage" to atone for the church's role in the residential school system, in which generations of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and forced to attend church-run, government-funded boarding schools to assimilate them into Christian, Canadian society. The Canadian government has said physical and sexual abuse were rampant at the schools, with students beaten for speaking their native languages.</p> <p>Francis on Monday apologized for the "evil" of church personnel who worked in the schools and the "catastrophic" effect of the school system on Indigenous families. In a speech before government authorities Wednesday, Francis apologized anew and blasted the school system as "deplorable."</p> <p>Francis noted that the school system was "promoted by the governmental authorities at the time" as part of a policy of assimilation and enfranchisement. But responding to criticism, he added that "local Catholic institutions had a part" in implementing that policy.</p> <p>Indigenous peoples have long demanded that the pope assume responsibility not just for abuses committed by individual Catholic priests and religious orders, but for the Catholic Church's institutional support of the assimilation policy and the papacy's 15th century religious justification for European colonial expansion to spread Christianity.</p>

More than 150,000 Native children in Canada were taken from their homes from the 19th century until the 1970s and placed in the schools in an effort to isolate them from the influence of their families and culture.

Trudeau, a Catholic whose father, Pierre Trudeau, was prime minister while the last residential schools were in operation, insisted that the Catholic Church as an institution bore blame and needed to do more to atone.

Speaking before Francis, he noted that Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 had called for a papal apology to be delivered on Canadian soil, but that Francis' visit "would not have been possible without the courage and perseverance" of survivors of First Nations, Inuit and Metis who travelled to the Vatican last spring to press their case for an apology.

"Apologies for the role that the Roman Catholic Church, as an institution, played in the mistreatment on the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse that Indigenous children suffered in residential schools run by the church," Trudeau said.

The Canadian government has apologized for its role in the school legacy. Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a formal apology over the residential schools in Parliament in 2008, calling them a sad chapter in Canadian history and saying the policy of forced assimilation caused great harm.

As part of a settlement of a lawsuit involving the government, churches and the approximately 90,000 surviving students, Canada paid reparations that amounted to billions of dollars being transferred to Indigenous communities. The Catholic Church, for its part, has paid over \$50 million and intends to add \$30 million more over the next five years.

Trudeau implied that much more needed to be done by the church, and that while Francis' visit had "an enormous impact" on survivors, it was but a first step.

Aside from the content of his speech, Trudeau's remarks broke customary protocol for papal trips. According to diplomatic protocol, only Simon was supposed to address the pope in her capacity as the representative head of state. Simon, an Inuk who is the first Indigenous person to hold the largely ceremonial position governor general, did address Francis.

But the Vatican said Trudeau's office requested the prime minister be allowed to offer some introductory remarks, a request that arrived in the days before Francis left Rome but after the pope's itinerary had been finalized and printed.

A senior Canadian government official said Trudeau typically delivers remarks during visits by foreign leaders and that it was important for him to address Canadians during Francis' visit "particularly given the importance of the matter." It was, however, added in at the last minute.

Before Francis arrived in Quebec City, Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Marc Miller said the "gaps" in Francis' apology could not be ignored.

Echoing criticism from some school survivors, Miller noted that Francis didn't mention sexual abuse in his list of abuses endured by Indigenous children in the schools. Francis on Monday listed instead physical, verbal, psychological and spiritual abuse. In addition, Miller noted that Francis on Monday spoke of "evil" committed by individual Christians "but not the Catholic Church as an institution."

Phil Fontaine, a survivor of sexual abuse at the schools and former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said the additional reference Wednesday to "local Catholic institutions" went beyond Francis' original apology and was significant and the closest he could get to apologizing for the entire Church in Canada.

Return to Top	<p>“It reflects the reality that the Catholic Church in Canada is not one institution. It is made up of about 73 different legal institutions, all of which were defendants in the lawsuits,” Fontaine said in a statement.</p> <p>Francis’ visit has stirred mixed emotions among survivors and their relatives, as well as Indigenous leaders and community members. Some have welcomed his apology as genuine and useful in helping them heal. Others have said it was merely the first step in a long process of reconciliation. Still others have said it didn’t go far enough in assuming responsibility for institutional wrongs dating back centuries.</p> <p>Francis himself has acknowledged that the wounds will take time to heal and that his visit and apology were but first steps. On Wednesday he committed himself and the local Canadian church to “move forward on a fraternal and patient journey with all Canadians, in accordance with truth and justice, working for healing and reconciliation, and constantly inspired by hope.”</p> <p>“It is our desire to renew the relationship between the Church and the indigenous peoples of Canada, a relationship marked both by a love that has borne outstanding fruit and, tragically, deep wounds that we are committed to understanding and healing,” he said.</p> <p>But he didn’t list any specific actions the Holy See was prepared to take.</p> <p>Trudeau, too, said the visit was a beginning and that reconciliation was the duty of everyone. “It’s our responsibility to see our differences not as an obstacle but as an occasion to learn, to better understand one another and to move to action.”</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	07/27 WordFly ransomware attack
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/arts-organizations-alarmed-after-wordfly-ransomware-attack/
GIST	<p>Arts organizations around the world are expressing concern about the wide-ranging impact of a ransomware attack on WordFly, a tech company providing digital marketing for dozens of the most popular cultural organizations in several countries.</p> <p>The company handles email and text message marketing for organizations like the Smithsonian, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Canada Stage, the Sydney Dance Company in Australia, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the U.K.’s Old Vic Theatre and several other major organizations.</p> <p>But WordFly’s Kirk Bentley told customers nine days ago that a ransomware attack rendered their “technological environment inaccessible” and encrypted the WordFly application.</p> <p>Bentley said on July 10, the company hired an outside digital forensics firm and cybersecurity teams to address the issue.</p> <p>By July 14, the company confirmed that the ransomware group “exported the email addresses and other data our customers utilize to communicate with their subscribers from our environment to an external location.”</p> <p>The stolen information includes email addresses, names, and other data customers import or collect via WordFly forms. Several organizations use WordFly for surveys and other customer events.</p> <p>“At this time, we believe that the exported data was not sensitive in nature and largely consisted of names and email addresses. It is our understanding that as of the evening of July 15, 2022, the data was deleted from the bad actor’s possession,” said Bentley, who works as the company’s business development director of SaaS products.</p>

“We have no evidence to suggest, before the bad actor deleted the data, that the data was leaked or disseminated elsewhere. We also have no evidence to suggest that any of this information has been, or will be, misused.”

Bentley said they believe the attack has been “contained” but noted that they are still investigating the incident.

The company is slowly restoring its services but as of Wednesday, [all of its systems remain offline](#).

WordFly claimed that organizations who had information involved in the breach do not necessarily need to notify their customers because they don’t believe the stolen information “has been, or will be, misused to perpetrate harm to the rights and liberties of our customers or their subscribers.”

They provided organizations with sample statements they can send to subscribers and customers. The statements focus on the lack of credit card numbers or government ID information and claim the data stolen in the attack was “non-sensitive.”

Several organizations have released statements about the incident, despite WordFly’s insistence that the information involved was not serious.

The Smithsonian [said](#) WordFly told them it “worked with the attackers” and confirmed that the stolen data was deleted. They pledged to provide more updates if information from WordFly changed.

“We want to reassure you that we use this service to facilitate email communication and we do not store any information in the system that is financial or sensitive that could have been exposed by this incident,” Smithsonian said. “WordFly believes the information was deleted, however we wanted to notify you of this incident since this is data you shared with us.”

The Toronto Symphony Orchestra [changed email providers](#) and sent a message to its customers, providing the same information the Smithsonian did but adding an additional warning that customers should be wary of any emails asking for personal information. They urged customers to watch for any unauthorized charges in their accounts.

“In particular, remain vigilant of any communications that refer to your relationship with the Orchestra,” the organization said, according to IT World Canada. “The Orchestra will never ask you to provide payment, financial or other confidential information via email.”

[Several organizations across Australia, the United Kingdom](#) and more sent similar messages to customers and subscribers.

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HEADLINE	07/27 US, UK law enforcement data sharing starts
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/uk-us-cloud-act-to-begin/
GIST	<p>The Department of Justice announced last week that it will begin using a controversial 2018 law meant to give law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and U.K. easier access to data from technology and telecom companies as part of criminal investigations.</p> <p>The little noticed announcement that Justice will use the “data access agreement” beginning in October with U.K. officials comes more than four years after Congress passed what is known as the Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data (CLOUD) Act in March 2018. Justice has said the legislation will “speed access to electronic information held by U.S.-based global providers that is critical to our foreign partners’ investigations of serious crime.”</p> <p>In an announcement posted to its website, Justice hailed the inaugural partnership with the U.K. as the “start a new era of cooperation.”</p>

But digital rights advocates and tech policy experts are less bullish and note that the CLOUD Act passed with no debate as part of a \$1.3 trillion government spending bill, a process [the Electronic Frontier Foundation has said](#) resulted in a “tacked-on piece of legislation [that] will erode privacy protections around the globe.”

The data access agreement will reduce protections for foreigners in troubling ways, according to Andrew Crocker, a senior staff attorney at EFF.

“Each of these agreements between the U.S. and other governments raises concerns that it will allow foreign governments to obtain information held by U.S. companies, without full review by U.S. courts and some of the protections for civil liberties that comes with that,” Crocker said. He noted that the U.K. has “very troubling encryption laws” that authorize the British government to force providers to compromise encrypted communications.

Greg Nojeim worked with the Department of Justice to craft the legislation with an eye on civil liberties protections. But he said his organization, the Center for Democracy and Technology, a nonprofit focused on internet policy, ultimately declined to support the bill because the final legislation did not do enough to protect individual civil liberties.

Nojeim, who serves as director of CDT’s Security and Surveillance Project, said the bill’s passage will reduce pressure on the U.S. government to deal with what can be a cumbersome process for complying with foreign government data requests in law enforcement matters. But he said that process protects civil rights: Until the CLOUD Act agreement with the U.K. takes effect in October, officials in Britain and Northern Ireland have to “meet a very high U.S. standard, the probable cause standard” to obtain such data, he said.

Because the CLOUD Act does not address a key gap in U.S. law regarding cross-border data demands, Nojeim said it will be possible for technology companies to share what’s known as non-content, or data about users captured during account management and customer support activities such as name, street address and IP address.

As it stands, when a foreign government is seeking non-content data from a U.S. provider, the provider has complete discretion on whether to provide it, he said.

“If we’re going to go down the road of allowing foreign governments’ laws to dictate whether a U.S. provider will make a disclosure of information about a foreigner believed to be abroad, we ought to at least ensure that those demands for non-content meet the foreign government’s surveillance law requirements,” Nojeim said.

Since the U.S. has not done that, the CLOUD Act effectively creates a “parallel system” where a foreign government can “appeal to the provider to voluntarily disclose the information without complying with its own local law,” Nojeim said. “That seems a significant defect in the legislation.”

Nojeim also worries there is “room for mischief” in terms of which individual countries the U.S. may choose to partner with beyond the U.K.

“If the Department of Justice, under pressure from an administration, wants to enter into a Cloud Act agreement with another country for various political reasons that might cause it to interpret flexibly the weak requirements of the CLOUD Act,” Nojeim said.

Nojeim said he specifically worries about the U.S. forging a CLOUD Act agreement with a country that has a poor human rights record and a less than independent judiciary.

“One wouldn’t want U.S. providers to honor surveillance demands made by that country because they could be used to persecute rather than prosecute,” he said. “Other countries will line up to get the same treatment that’s being offered to the U.K.”

He said that Canada, India, Turkey, Japan and most of the countries in the European Union are now seeking a data-sharing agreement akin to the one with the U.K. government.

The Justice Department sees it differently. [In its announcement regarding the U.K. agreement](#), Justice said the development will help law enforcement prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute serious crime “more quickly than ever before.”

“This will help, for example, our law enforcement agencies gain more effective access to the evidence they need to bring offenders to justice, including terrorists and child abuse offenders, thereby preventing further victimization,” the Justice announcement said. “Our Agreement will maintain the strong oversight and protections that our citizens enjoy and does not compromise or erode the human rights and freedoms that our nations cherish and share.”

A spokesperson for the Department of Justice said via email that the U.K. agreement “does not alter the fundamental constitutional and statutory requirements U.S. law enforcement must meet to obtain legal process for that data – standards that are among the most privacy-protective in the world. The US-UK Data Access Agreement is only used to obtain information relating to the prevention, detection, investigation, or prosecution of serious crime and only in response to legal process.”

A former Justice prosecutor who helped draft the CLOUD Act said it is an important new tool for law enforcement worldwide. Aaron Cooper, now a partner at Jenner & Block and previously a prosecutor in the DOJ’s Computer Crimes and Intellectual Property Section, said that strict U.S. laws have to date challenged what U.S. data providers and law enforcement can share.

“For the DOJ to use its domestic investigative powers on behalf of a foreign law enforcement entity, and then return the data to the requesting entity, that could get really cumbersome at times,” Cooper said. “So, there’s a significant national security issue for the U.K. and some of our [the U.S.’s] other law enforcement partners.”

Cooper said CLOUD Act agreements also will likely keep countries from requiring providers to store data concerning people located in their jurisdiction inside the country. Cooper said that such “data balkanization” would be problematic and the CLOUD Act should address such pressures.

The CLOUD Act is “relieving the conflict of laws and that solves a lot of these policy problems,” Cooper said.

Historically U.S. technology providers have declined to provide substantive investigative data to foreign partners due to potential legal conflicts or out of concerns over legal predication, Cooper said. Adoption of the CLOUD Act also addresses investigative hurdles the U.K. faces due to the rise of end-to-end encryption platforms. This type of encryption makes it difficult for the U.K. to conduct wiretap investigations without help from U.S. providers, Cooper said.

But Cooper acknowledged there are questions about how the CLOUD Act will play out.

“If the U.S. finds out that the U.K. is not complying with or respecting the rules, and things aren’t working the way we wanted them to, what are the consequences?” Cooper said.

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HEADLINE	07/27 FBI: fake cryptocurrency apps
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/application-security/fake-cryptocurrency-apps-trick-us-investors-fbi-reports
GIST	The roller-coaster ride of cryptocurrency valuations recently has a new wrinkle: criminal groups are increasingly defrauding investors with their fraudulent crypto applications, according to a recent notice from the FBI.

Becoming more aggressive in their schemes, cybercriminals are reaching out directly to U.S.-based investors in cryptocurrency, “claiming to offer legitimate cryptocurrency investment services, and convincing investors to download fraudulent mobile apps, which the cyber criminals have used with increasing success over time to defraud the investors of their cryptocurrency,” according to the private industry notification released last week by the FBI’s Cyber Division.

The FBI reportedly identified 244 victims who lost a total of \$42.7 million in recent months through these scams, according to the notice, which was specifically aimed at U.S. financial institutions and customers, “who suspect they have been defrauded through fake cryptocurrency investment apps.”

“Threat cybercriminals are creating fraudulent cryptocurrency investment apps to exploit legitimate cryptocurrency investments, defrauding U.S. investors and causing reputational harm to U.S. investment firms,” the FBI notice stated.

The FBI notice pointed out that cybercriminals are taking advantage of the recent trend of “innovative financial institutions offer[ing] mobile apps to enhance user experience and increase legitimate investment. ... The FBI has observed cyber criminals using the names, logos, and other identifying information of legitimate USBUSs, including creating fake websites with this information, as part of their ruse to gain investors.”

Indeed, given the rising popularity and ubiquity of cryptocurrency investment and the fast-paced changes in valuations, crypto scams “are more pervasive than ever,” according to a [report released](#) in late June by fraud prevention company Sift. More than 1 in 5 consumers (22%) who have encountered crypto scams have lost money, and more than 2 out of 5 (43%) have encountered scams asking them to join fake crypto exchanges, according to Sift’s findings.

At the root of many of these crypto-scams is “misleading or fraudulent content,” particularly published on social media, which has caused unwitting investors to be taken in by these increasingly sophisticated fake applications, Sift reported. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of the consumers Sift had surveyed said they see misleading content on at least a weekly basis, and two-thirds (65%) said that they see social networks as the “most dangerous” source of false information.

Names of fake apps closely related to legitimate crypto exchanges

These attacks are not only becoming more frequent and advanced, but fraudsters are also leveraging legitimate applications and financial concerns along with false information to steal steadily more money from their victims with each individual scam. Between Dec. 22, 2021, and May 7, 2022, the FBI discovered that “unidentified cybercriminals purporting to be a legitimate U.S. financial institution defrauded at least 28 victims of approximately \$3.7 million.”

In that particular scheme, cybercriminals convinced victims to download an app that used the name and logo of an actual U.S. financial institution and deposit cryptocurrency into wallets associated with the victims’ accounts on the application.

“When 13 of the 28 victims attempted to withdraw funds from the app, they received an email stating they had to pay taxes on their investments before making withdrawals,” the FBI reported in its notice. “After paying the supposed tax, the victims remained unable to withdraw funds.”

And that’s just the tip of the crypto-fraud iceberg: Between October 2021 and May 2022, one group dubbed YiBit1 (close to the same name of a real crypto-exchange that shuttered in 2018) stole roughly \$5.5 million from at least four victims. In November 2021, cybercrime group Supayos (also known as Supay2, which is very similar to the name of legitimate currency exchange in Australia) coaxed \$900,000 out of one victim by convincing the crypto-investor that there was a “minimum balance” of that much that had to be deposited in the account.

	As cybercriminals increasingly exploit the names of or connections to legitimate financial and cryptocurrency concerns, it has become harder for even savvy cryptocurrency investors to discern the real from the fake. One-third (33%) of consumers who have been a victim of payment fraud identified financial service sites as “the ones that pose the highest risk,” according to Sift’s Q1 Digital Trust and Safety Index. The Sift report also found that crypto exchanges alone had seen a 140% uptick in “abuse” over the first quarter of this year.
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HEADLINE	07/27 Malware as messaging bots to steal data
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/criminals-malware-messaging-bots/
GIST	<p>Criminals are using malicious bots to steal information from victims via the popular Telegram and Discord messaging services, said a report this week. Some bots can be rented for as little as \$25 a day.</p> <p>The bot-based malware steals credentials, including virtual private network (VPN) client logins, payment card information, cryptocurrency wallets, operating system data, passwords and Microsoft Windows product keys, said security company Intel 471. They can also steal session cookies – all sent via a bot that talks directly to these messaging platforms.</p> <p>The company found criminals using the messaging apps as command and control mechanisms. In a blog post this week, it said that it noticed the use of information stealers on both of these platforms using the bot functionality that allows software to automatically send messages from a computer using these channels.</p> <p>One malware strain, Blitzed Grabber, uses a feature called webhooks in Discord. A webhook is an automated message that a computer sends when triggered by an event.</p> <p>Another malware bot, called X-Files, allows its criminal owners to control it inside the Telegram messaging app. They can send commands to the bot via Telegram, directing it to steal data and send it to a Telegram channel they choose.</p> <p>Bots often steal information from browsers. Some bots also use the Telegram network to steal one-time password (OTP) tokens and SMS verification codes, the company said.</p> <p>The messaging apps that these bot-based malware strains target have a large consumer audience. Some use the apps to relay data from consumer-only apps like the children’s online gaming platform Roblox and Microsoft’s Minecraft 3D world.</p> <p>Nevertheless, malware exploiting these apps could form the initial stage of a targeted attack against an enterprise, Intel 471 said. Some businesses do use Telegram and Discord for communications, and in any case, employees might install Telegram or Discord on their machines for personal use.</p> <p>The criminals are also using the messaging channels’ own networks to host and distribute their malware, according to the Intel 471 analysis. Discord runs its own content distribution network, which attackers use to host malware files, giving them a reputable domain for distribution.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/28 Europe police arrest 100 BEC scammers
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/european-police-100-suspects-bec/
GIST	<p>European police have released details of two major operations against business email compromise (BEC) fraudsters, which resulted in the arrest of close to 100 suspects.</p> <p>Operation Wine Cellar and Operation Theatre were carried out in November 2021 but are only now being made public due to operational reasons, Europol said.</p>

They were carried out by the Anti-Economic Crime Department of the Budapest Metropolitan Police with the support of Europol's European Financial and Economic Crime Centre.

The Budapest Metropolitan Police made the arrests after working its way through two complex fraud cases.

They involved an organized crime group in the region which targeted state-owned companies with fake invoices.

"The criminals would impersonate a service company to inform their victims that the service company now had a new bank account to which the payments for the provided services should be sent," [Europol explained](#).

"Once the payments were made to the bank accounts controlled by the criminals, the funds would be moved around to conceal their illegal origin."

The scheme defrauded 94 organizations in this way, racking up profits of €2.8m for the scammers.

The gang is said to have used a "sophisticated money laundering infrastructure" to obfuscate the flow of proceeds from these crimes and hamper investigator efforts to track it down.

Europol money laundering specialists and financial analysts were sent to Hungary on both action days to help investigators with house searches and forensic analysis of seized devices, the policing group said.

BEC has for several years been the highest-earning cybercrime type for threat actors. In 2021, it [resulted in losses of \\$2.4bn for victims](#), over a third of the total reported to the FBI that year.

Around a year ago police in [Europe arrested](#) nearly two dozen suspects in a €1m BEC bust.

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HEADLINE	07/28 UK: social media accounts hijacked
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/social-media-accounts-hijacked/
GIST	<p>UK police are warning of a surge in social media hacking incidents in which victims' accounts are flooded with indecent images of children.</p> <p>Action Fraud said it had received scores of reports since the start of the year, with incidents increasing month by month.</p> <p>"Based on the review of these Action Fraud reports, there appears to be no financial motivation behind this hacking, with no report received mentioning a ransom demand," it explained.</p> <p>"Offenders have not been limited to just indecent images, but have reportedly uploaded videos of the same nature. The majority of victims were not aware of the hacking until they received an email from the social media platform informing them that their account had been suspended."</p> <p>Action Fraud said any indecent images of children should be reported to the police by calling 101 or visiting a local police station. It added that such images should never be screenshotted, saved or shared.</p> <p>It urged social media users to protect their accounts with two-factor authentication, which will help to mitigate the risk of passwords being phished, guessed or brute forced by attackers.</p> <p>Password security can also be improved by choosing strong, unique credentials such as three random words, it said.</p>

	<p>Social media account takeovers are nothing new, but the posting of indecent images to deface those accounts is rare.</p> <p>More common is posting of cryptocurrency scams and other fraud schemes, as happened to the official accounts of the British Army earlier this month.</p> <p>Some account takeover attacks like this are genuine attempts to make money by hijacking the trust relationship between account holders and their often large group of followers.</p> <p>However, others are attempts to gain notoriety, as was the case with the hijacking of several NFL teams' Twitter accounts back in 2020. In a similar stunt earlier this year, the account of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) was hacked to post distasteful messages.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 DDoS attack trends in 2022
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ddos-attack-trends-in-2022-ultrashort-powerful-multivector-attacks/
GIST	<p>The political situation in Europe and the rest of the world has degraded dramatically in 2022. This has affected the nature, intensity, and geography of DDoS attacks, which have become actively used for political purposes.</p> <p>New industry trends due to the conflict in Europe</p> <p>The situation in Eastern Europe has affected the entire cybersecurity industry, particularly in areas such as DDoS attacks and protection. Now, states are becoming active participants in this market while the attacks themselves are becoming more sophisticated and powerful.</p> <p>Geopolitical situation changing the objectives, nature, and intensity of DDoS attacks</p> <p>During the first half of 2022, several countries reported attacks on government and financial institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This cyberattack aimed at disabling banks and government websites was the worst in the history of Ukraine. It started on Tuesday, February 15, and lasted until Wednesday, with the goal of causing widespread confusion,” according to the Ukrainian government. “This attack was prepared in advance to destabilize and sow panic and chaos in our country.” The attack targeted the website of the Ministry of Defense and the Ukrainian state services digital portal, Diia, as well as the ATM networks and mobile applications of Oschadbank and PrivatBank. • On March 11, the Chinese state agency Xinhua claimed that cyberattacks were tracked to the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands. These attacks were carried out via computers in China and targeted Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian resources. Despite the state agency naming the sources of these detected cyberattacks, it did not attribute them to any particular country. The attacks could have been orchestrated by hackers who have acquired IP addresses in these countries. • On April 8, the Finnish Ministry of Defense and Foreign Affairs websites were subject to cyberattacks. “We are investigating the matter and will provide information when we know more about the incident,” said the ministry, the suspects behind the attack haven’t been revealed. <p>States becoming official participants in the DDoS mitigation market</p> <p>The DDoS market can often be described as spontaneous. Attacks that are powerful and costly for customers are not uncommon, but governments used to be more restrained when protecting against them. Now, rumours about the actions of state structures in this segment are often confirmed by officials. For example, at the end of February 2022, the U.S. Attorney General publicly confirmed that the FBI conducted a secret operation to eliminate Russian malware and prevent a large-scale DDoS attack.</p> <p>The emergence of cyber troops in Ukraine is also well-documented, their creation last year was confirmed by the country’s government. The recruitment process began in February 2022, and they have been tasked with ensuring information security and protecting critical infrastructure. Such active government intervention in the industry may well fundamentally change the market forever.</p>

How has DDoS attack complexity, power, and duration changed?

This has had a marked impact on the power, geography, and duration of DDoS attacks. The list of the main DDoS attack victims, for both countries and industries, has changed significantly in recent months.

Attacks are becoming more complex and multi vectored

There are several distinctive types of [DDoS attacks](#):

- Ransom DDoS attacks are carried out for extortion - the attackers promise to cease their attack upon receiving the ransom.
- Application-layer DDoS attacks interfere with or even completely paralyse the operation of business applications, which causes material and reputational loss for the targets.
- Network-layer DDoS attacks sap networks' bandwidth and disrupt the target's interactions with partners and clients.

Each type of attack exploits different vulnerabilities in the victim's infrastructure. Previously, attacks were based on a particular vector, but now the share of more sophisticated malicious campaigns is growing. Rather than directly attacking the victim's server, attackers paralyse one of its key functions and conduct combined attacks along different vectors.

According to Gcore, the number of such complex multivector attacks tripled in 2022 compared to the previous year. Bots and botnets have become the most common vectors for DDoS attacks, while HTTP flood attacks are also widely used.

The number of ultrashort attacks and average attack power are increasing

In recent years, the number of ultrashort DDoS attacks has been growing. According to [Gcore](#), in 2022 the average duration of such attacks was 5–10 seconds.

The longest attack was recorded by the company's specialists on April 14–15. It lasted 24 hours with a capacity of 5 Gbps.

The average power of recorded attacks in Q1–Q2 of 2022 more than doubled - last year, it was 300 Gbps, and this year it is already 700 Gbps. Previously, the main targets of such attacks were small and medium-sized companies, but this year more and more attacks are aimed at government agencies.

Government agencies are becoming frequent targets of DDoS attacks

The beginning of 2022 was marked by some of the most powerful attacks of recent years. Most of them targeted government agencies:

1. January 15 — [An attack on North Korean infrastructure](#). It led to a complete blackout in the country for 6 hours. As a result of the attack, all transportation in the country was paralyzed.
2. January 16 — [An attack on Ukrainian government websites](#). The websites of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Emergency Service, Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Energy, and Diia were paralysed.
3. February 15 — [Attacks on the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces, PrivatBank, and Oschadbank](#). As a result of the simultaneous attacks, many Ukrainian banking systems were down, as well as several government websites.
4. February 23 — [An attack on the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Parliament](#). As a result of the large-scale attacks, several government websites went down.
5. March 10 — [An attack on Ukrtelecom](#). For 40 minutes, the work of the national telecom operator of Ukraine and the operation of networks and essential communication channels throughout the country were disrupted.
6. March 11 — [An attack on the Rostec website](#). The state aerospace and defence company said it has been under constant DDoS attacks since February.
7. March 14 — [An attack on Israeli government websites](#). The websites of the Ministries of Interior, Defense, Health, Justice, and Social Services, as well as the Prime Minister's Office, were attacked. The campaign was labelled the strongest cyberattack ever launched against Israel.

8. March 16 — [An attack on the Ukrainian internet service provider Triolan](#). This resulted in severe internet outages for its Ukrainian users.
9. March 29 — [An attack on the Bradley Airport website](#). Unknown hackers launched an attack on the website of the Bradley International Airport, U.S.A.
10. April 8 — [An attack on the Finnish Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs](#). The departments' websites were unavailable and malfunctioned throughout the day.

Businesses are undergoing heavy flood attacks

[According to Gcore](#), the most-attacked business sectors in Q1–Q2 of 2022 were e-commerce, fintech, and game development. The company shared information about powerful TCP and UDP flood attacks.

Increasing DDoS protection requirements

To defend against such powerful and sophisticated attacks, businesses and government agencies need advanced security systems. This is not the first time that Gcore has experienced a sharp increase in the number of DDoS attacks and their complexity.

In 2020–2021, along with increased content consumption in online games and entertainment industry, DDoS attacks also became more frequent and sophisticated. The attacks became more devious - Instead of targeting specific servers, attackers focused on web applications (L7 of the OSI network model) and tried to legitimise the traffic.

One of the main targets of cybercriminals was our client, Wargaming. On February 18, 2021, the security system of Gcore detected a UDP Flood—an attack aimed at the servers of the game development company.

Its volume reached 253 Gbps, and it lasted 15 minutes - we deflected it successfully. It was possible thanks to the huge bandwidth of our network and our filtering system, which detects and neutralises attacks at a speed of hundreds of gigabits per second.

Our comprehensive protection algorithms ensure that our security systems are not bypassed, even in cases where attackers try to use traffic similar to legitimate ones.

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HEADLINE	07/27 New 'Robin Banks' phishing service
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-robin-banks-phishing-service-targets-bofa-citi-and-wells-fargo/
GIST	<p>A new phishing as a service (PhaaS) platform named 'Robin Banks' has been launched, offering ready-made phishing kits targeting the customers of well-known banks and online services.</p> <p>The targeted entities include Citibank, Bank of America, Capital One, Wells Fargo, PNC, U.S. Bank, Lloyds Bank, the Commonwealth Bank in Australia, and Santander.</p> <p>Additionally, Robin Banks offers templates to steal Microsoft, Google, Netflix, and T-Mobile accounts.</p> <p>According to a report by IronNet, whose analysts discovered the new phishing platform, Robin Banks is already being deployed in large-scale campaigns that started in mid-June, targeting victims via SMS and email.</p> <p>Emergence of Robin Banks</p> <p>Robin Banks is the new project of a cybercrime group believed to be active since at least March 2022, created for quickly crafting high-quality phishing pages to target customers of large financial organizations.</p> <p>It is sold in two price tiers, one offering single pages and 24/7 support for \$50 per month, and another is giving unlimited access to all templates and 24/7 support for \$200 per month.</p>

Upon registration, threat actors receive a personal dashboard containing reports about their operations, easy page creation, wallet management, and options to create custom phishing sites.

The platform also gives users options like adding reCAPTCHA to thwart bots or checking user agent strings to block specific victims from highly-targeted campaigns.

"The Robin Banks website has a more sophisticated yet user-friendly webGUI than 16Shop and BulletProofLink — two well-known phishing kits that are also notably more expensive than Robin Banks as well," comments IronNet in the report.

Also, the new PhaaS platform is constantly adding new templates and updating the old ones to reflect the targeted entities' style and color scheme changes.

These advantages have made Robin Banks popular in the cybercrime space, and many cybercriminals have adopted it in the past couple of months.

An active campaign

In one campaign spotted by IronNet last month, an operator of Robin Banks targeted customers of Citibank via SMS that warned them about "unusual usage" of their debit card.

The provided link to lift the alleged security limitations takes victims to a phishing page where they are requested to enter their personal details.

Upon landing on the phishing site, the victim's browser is fingerprinted to determine if they're on desktop or mobile, and the appropriate web page version is loaded.

Once the victim enters all the required details on the form fields of the phishing site, a POST request is sent to the Robin Banks API, containing two unique tokens, one for the campaign operator and one for the victim.

The phishing site sends one POST request for each web page the victim fills out, which works as a fail-safe to steal as many details as possible since the phishing process may stop at any time due to suspicion or other reasons.

All data sent to the Robin Banks API is viewable from the platform's webGUI for both the operator and the platform administrators.

Robin Banks also gives the option to forward stolen details to the operator's personal Telegram channel for convenience.

Outlook

The emergence of a new high-quality PhaaS platform isn't favorable for internet users, as it promotes phishing to low-skill cybercriminals and augments the bombardment of tricky messages.

To keep yourself safe from these malicious attempts, never click on links sent via SMS or email, and always confirm the website you've landed on is the official one.

Finally, enable 2FA on all your accounts and use a private phone number to receive the one-time passwords.

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HEADLINE	07/28 Hackers find new attack vectors
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/as-microsoft-blocks-office-macros-hackers-find-new-attack-vectors/

Hackers who normally distributed malware via phishing attachments with malicious macros gradually changed tactics after Microsoft Office began blocking them by default, switching to new file types such as ISO, RAR, and Windows Shortcut (LNK) attachments.

VBA and XL4 Macros are small programs created to automate repetitive tasks in Microsoft Office applications, which threat actors abuse for loading, dropping, or installing malware via malicious Microsoft Office document attachments sent in phishing emails.

The reason for the switch is [Microsoft announcing](#) that they would end the massive abuse of the Office subsystem by automatically blocking macros by default and making it harder to activate them.

Although it took Microsoft [a little longer](#) to implement this Microsoft Office change, the block finally [entered into effect](#) last week.

However, the initial announcement alone convinced malware operators to move away from macros and begin experimenting with alternative methods to infect victims.

Hackers abandon macros

In a new report by Proofpoint, researchers looked at malicious campaign stats between October 2021 and June 2022 and identified a clear shift to other methods of payload distribution, recording a decrease of 66% in the use of macros.

At the same time, the use of container files such as ISOs, ZIPs, and RARs has grown steadily, rising by almost 175%.

The use of LNK files exploded after February 2022, the time of Microsoft's announcement, increasing by a whopping 1,675% compared to October 2021, and being the weapon of choice of ten individual threat groups tracked by Proofpoint.

We have reported on the use of LNK files by [Emotet](#), [Qbot](#), and [IcedID](#), in all cases masquerading as a Word document to trick the recipient into opening it.

However, these link files can be used to execute almost any command the user has permission to use, including executing PowerShell scripts that download and execute malware from remote sources.

Finally, Proofpoint also observed a significant increase in the use of HTML attachments adopting the HTML smuggling technique to drop a malicious file on the host system. However, their distribution volumes continue to remain small.

Shifting the threat

While seeing macros becoming an obsolete method of payload distribution and initial infection is a positive development, the threat has merely shifted rather than being addressed or reduced.

The question that needs answers now is how that change impacts the effectiveness of the malware campaigns, as convincing recipients to open .docx and .xls files was a lot easier than asking them to unpack archives and open files whose names end with .lnk.

Furthermore, to bypass detection by security software, many phishing campaigns now password-protect archive attachments, adding another burdensome step a target must take to access the malicious files.

From that perspective, threat actors relying on phishing emails might be running out of good options, and their infection rates may have dropped as a result.

Finally, email security solutions now have a narrower spectrum of potential risks to evaluate, improving their chances of catching a risky file.

HEADLINE	07/27 Leak: TikTok downplays China association
SOURCE	https://gizmodo.com/tiktok-master-messaging-pr-playbook-china-music-1849334736
GIST	<p>Leaked documents from within TikTok reveal how the company games out responses to tricky questions — and highlight what the company thinks its biggest public perception problems are. Chief among them: China.</p> <p>The PR documents, which Gizmodo obtained from within the company, are titled “TikTok Master Messaging” and “TikTok Key Messages.” Both are explanations of press talking points in English and include a version translated into a European language. (Gizmodo is not naming the language to protect the sourcing of the document.) The larger of the two, the 53-page TikTok Master Messaging document, outlines key messages the company wants to present to the public. The dossier’s version history shows it was last updated in August 2021 but had been consistently altered since it was created in March 2020.</p> <p>Right near the top of the list? “Downplay the parent company ByteDance, downplay the China association, downplay AI.” All three bullet points are the second, third and fourth lines of the document, second only to “Emphasise TikTok as a brand/platform.” Further down, the company advises its employees to stress that, though young people love TikTok, “the app is only for users aged 13 and over.”</p> <p>The documents are influential even beyond TikTok’s responses to everyday news stories: Language similar to what’s in them appeared in a TikTok executive’s testimony before the United Kingdom’s parliament and in the company’s letters to United States senators. TikTok declined to answer questions about the leaked materials.</p> <p>The Chinese link is a known issue for TikTok PR—an FCC commissioner asked Apple and Google to remove it from their app stores over the connection in late June—and it comes up frequently across both documents. In the 15-page TikTok Key Messages document, which was created in February 2021, TikTok’s public relations people are given soundbites to address any questions about “China/Bytedance Ownership”.</p> <p>The soundbites include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There’s a lot of misinformation about TikTok right now. The reality is that the TikTok app isn’t even available in China.” TikTok used this talking point when responding to the BBC. • “We have not and will not share user data with the Chinese government, and would not do so if asked.” TikTok used this one in response to BuzzFeed News. • “We have a number of measures in place to significantly reduce access to user data, and we continue to build those out.” TikTok published this talking point on its own blog. <p>The document goes on to provide “proof points” for TikTok PRs to take, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “TikTok is a global company” • “The TikTok app doesn’t even operate in China.” • “TikTok is highly localized in its experience and operations, which means <> has a lot of independence in the day-to-day operations of the platform.” <p>In the Master Messaging document, staff are given potential questions they may face from journalists and stock answers to them. Among the questions TikTok PR expects to face: “What is the relationship between Bytedance and its individual products such as TikTok and Toutiao?”, to which the PR is given the response: “Bytedance is the holding company of TikTok. TikTok employees cannot comment on ByteDance. We will refer to ByteDance itself.” Later, under the heading “DO NOT USE,” the document gives staff a high-level briefing of ByteDance’s background.</p> <p>The longer document also echoes the concern that there’s “a lot of information about TikTok being spread. These are the facts.” The document advises PRs to say, “TikTok has an American CEO, a head of security with decades of experience in the U.S. military and law enforcement, and a U.S. team that works diligently and responsibly on the consistent development of the security infrastructure. Four of the five seats on the Supervisory Board of our parent company are filled by some of the world’s most respected global investors.”</p>

Further down in the document, the company guides its PR staff to shy away from highlighting the age of its users, who are reputed to be younger (and cooler) than those on any other social network. “The app is only for users aged 13 and over, according to our terms and conditions,” the guidance recommends. “Therefore, in relation to our users, we may speak of young people, but not of children.”

The document highlights an internal statistic, one that shows TikTok may, in fact, be for the Olds: “Most of our users are between 16 and 25 years old. 67 percent of users are older than 25.”

PRs are also helped in heading off tricky questions about whether those young users could be spending mom and dad’s cash on livestreaming gifts. “We have a spending cap in the app,” the document advises company reps to say—before adding: “For internal information only: The spending cap is \$1,000 per day.” (This information has not been previously published.)

TikTok is likewise reticent to invite scrutiny of its algorithms and how they determine what gets seen—or heard. In the “Music” section of the Master Messaging document, highlighted in red is a bullet point reading: “No algo talk - personalized content feed fuels new music discovery”.

The company has also prepared quotes for questions about past moderation decisions, including [leaked guidelines](#) in 2019 that suggested content around the Tiananmen Square revolution would not be recommended through the app. They dovetail with the company’s “downplay the China association” strategy.

“In the early days we formulated our rules more restrictively in order to minimize conflicts,” PR representatives are recommended to say in the Master Messaging document. “As TikTok grew rapidly internationally last year, we realized that this was not the right approach. That’s why we gave our local teams a more prominent role in this process, as they have a more differentiated understanding of their respective markets. [...] While we built our local teams over the past year, we have also abandoned various regulations that were not appropriate for individual markets.”

That’s echoed in the shorter Key Messages document. “We’re a platform that’s nearly 3 years old and we’re operating in the scale of other big players. We take this responsibility seriously. In the early days, we made mistakes with our moderation policies and we take responsibility for them,” the document advises PRs say. “Our local team has full autonomy to make decisions about our content policies and implementation here.”

The phrasing on content moderation from both the Master and Key Messaging documents sounds very similar to [testimony given](#) to the UK parliament’s Digital, Culture, Media and Sports select committee in September 2020 by Theo Bertram, TikTok’s director of government relations and public policy in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Language PR staff are encouraged to use around data privacy also sounds similar to language used in [letters to US Senators](#) currently addressing concerns around TikTok’s data access practices. “A lot of apps collect data, and we are on par with, or less than, many others,” the document suggests PRs say. (This sentence, in European translation, appears with a comment of!!! in the Key Messages document.)

“We believe the type of user data that we collect is in line with what our peers collect and in many cases is far less,” the document continues. “For example, many peer companies collect very targeted location data. We don’t. We are happy to compare our practices to what others in the industry do. We take careful measures to protect that data from misuse.”

Version history on the Master Messaging document suggests it has been produced by taking excerpts of other internal documents, including those titled “TikTok Master Messaging – Europe,” “Commercial Messaging and FAQ,” “Ops Messaging and FAQ,” “Music Messaging and FAQ,” and “Marketing Messaging and FAQ.” Gizmodo did not obtain access to these documents.

TikTok did not answer questions about the documents. From its history in Google Docs, the Master Messaging document seems to be the result of collaboration across multiple teams at the company. It had been edited by nearly a dozen different people throughout its existence and included comments from six current or former TikTok employees. The second, Key Messages, document created in February 2021 was hosted on Lark, the productivity suite developed by parent company ByteDance, contained comments from three different users.

One PR representative for a competing big tech company says they're surprised by the document's content. "No one in PR wants a doc like this to end up in public, but the revealing thing here is not how many difficult topics the TikTok team are dealing with, rather it's the lack of basic information the company is willing to let its PR team use to answer simple questions," they say.

The lack of information puts TikTok PR at a disadvantage, the tech PR claims. "A PR needs to be able to answer basic questions – even if to a scale such as 'dozens' or 'hundreds' – in order to be taken seriously when talking on more difficult topics."

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HEADLINE	07/27 Report: supply-chain attacks on rise
SOURCE	https://portswigger.net/daily-swig/one-in-five-data-breaches-due-to-software-supply-chain-compromise-ibm-report-warns?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Supply chain attacks on the rise, costing businesses more year on year as organizations failing to implement zero trust strategies.</p> <p>This is according to IBM's new Cost of a Data Breach report, which found that one in five breaches occurred because of a compromise at a business partner, with a supply chain breach taking on average 26 days longer to identify and contain than the global average.</p> <p>The total cost of a supply chain compromise was \$4.46 million – 2.5% higher than average.</p> <p>The report also found that the global average cost of a data breach has hit an all-time high of \$4.35 million – up nearly 13% over the last two years.</p> <p>"Seventeen per cent of breaches in critical infrastructure organizations occurred due to a business partner being initially compromised – this shows us that organizations need to put more focus on the security controls that govern third party access," John Hendley, head of strategy at IBM Security X-Force told <i>The Daily Swig</i>.</p> <p>Zero trust, zero problems?</p> <p>Critical infrastructure organizations such as financial services, industrial, transportation, and healthcare companies are a growing target for these attacks, says IBM, and zero trust is the best way to guard against attack.</p> <p>"Organizations need to be more vigilant than ever and closely scrutinize these external points of access into their environment, whether that's through direct network access, applications, or even physical access," says Hendly.</p> <p>"Supply chain attacks are of great concern, both because of how insidious they are and how extreme their impacts can be. We saw this play out with SolarWinds, and we'll surely see more of these attacks in the future."</p> <p>Those organizations that had implemented a zero trust security approach saw breaches cost them less, with an average cost saving of \$1.5 million.</p> <p>However, critical infrastructure organizations in particular are failing to do this, with only one in five having adopted a zero trust model, compared with an overall global average of 41%.</p>

	<p>Javvad Malik, lead security awareness advocate at KnowBe4, says that greater transparency is needed across the supply chain, along with greater technical assurance that all components are adequately secured.</p> <p>“We’ve seen many organizations breached, not for the organization itself, but because it will provide a way into another. Popular examples of these include Target, RSA, and more recently SolarWinds,” he told <i>The Daily Swig</i>.</p> <p>“While many organisations try to mitigate risks by sending out lengthy questionnaires to third parties it deals with to determine the level of security they employ, it is often not sufficient to cover the entire supply chain, and even if it was, it doesn’t provide technical assurance.”</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Computer glitches harmed 150 patients
SOURCE	https://www.theregister.com/2022/07/27/oracle_cerner_glitches_harm_patients/
GIST	<p>Computer errors following the go-live of a new Oracle Cerner electronic health records system harmed nearly 150 patients at a Washington hospital, as revealed during a hearing in the US.</p> <p>Four days after Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane switched over to its new Cerner software, staff became aware of an "unknown queue" problem which had the potential to cause harm to patients, a US Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs heard last week.</p> <p>Oracle acquired Cerner — a specialist developer of electronic health records systems used throughout the world — for \$28.3 billion in June.</p> <p>With the acquisition, Oracle inherited a 10-year, \$10 billion contract with the Department for Veterans' Affairs signed in 2018. The deal was to design a health records system for VA hospitals and communicate with an EHR system that Cerner was installing for the US Department of Defense, replacing legacy systems, some of which were 40 years old.</p> <p>The committee heard the total budget for the project could bulge to \$49 billion, \$40 billion over early cost estimates, according to Senator Jerry Moran, (R-Kan), who was citing an Institute for Defense Analysis report.</p> <p>Witnesses described how the early rollout at five hospitals had been fraught with problems.</p> <p>Speaking at the hearing, David Case, deputy inspector general, Office of Inspector General, Department of Veterans Affairs, said (1:31:00) that the so-called "unknown queue" problem was among the top three.</p> <p>He explained the Oracle Cerner EHR system requires a healthcare provider writing a medical order for tests or other services to match the order to a certain delivery location. If a provider's selected option does not match the order to the correct delivery location, then the order would go to the unknown queue. Healthcare providers were unaware that their orders were not being acted upon.</p> <p>"Cerner leaders told us they had no knowledge that VA was told about the unknown queue before go-live. We were provided with exit documents noting a VA leader had approved of its use, but that official told us they had no awareness of it," Case said, adding, "This is reinforced by the fact that there was no training on the unknown queue, no planning for it and its existence was unknown at Mann-Grandstaff (hospital). As one VA clinician put it, 'We stumbled on the unknown queue'."</p> <p>In 2021, Veterans Health Administration patient safety experts found 60 safety concerns with the new software: the unknown queue being among the top three highest risks.</p> <p>The same experts identified "nearly 150 veterans at Mann-Grandstaff who suffered harm due to the unknown queue from go-live through to June 2021", Case testified.</p>

Although Cerner and VA took action to minimize the problem during 2021 and 2022, every facility that uses the software would need to monitor and manage their unknown queue, Case said.

"We have concerns about the adequacy of the current mitigation plan," he said.

Other VA hospitals already using the Cerner system are Walla Walla (Washington), Columbus (Ohio), Roseburg (Oregon), and White City (Oregon). The VA plans for another 25 hospitals and medical facilities to go live with the system between now and the end of next year.

While the unknown queue problem lies in design and user training, the Cerner system has also hit stability problems. The EHR system in Walla Walla, Washington, [went down for about 127 minutes in April](#).

Dr Gerard Cox, assistant under secretary for health for quality and patient safety, Veterans Health Administration, agreed that the unknown queue feature in the Oracle Cerner EHR was not working well and created instances of patient harm.

He said that since the first hospital went live on the system, technology and clinical teams had tried to mitigate the effects of the problem.

"There have been strategies put in place to monitor that queue and make sure that the orders that were lost for several months are now identified and dealt with on a daily basis. I don't think I would say that a permanent fix is in place," he said.

Speaking to senators, Terry Adirim, program executive director, Electronic Health Record Modernization Integration Office, Department of Veterans Affairs, said: "The unknown queue is not something really to be fixed. It's a feature of the Cerner software. It is the way it is designed and people can talk about whether it is a good or bad design. What happened during the deployment was poor communication, nobody was trained in using this feature and a process was not put in place."

She also said that clinicians coping during height of the pandemic affected the implementation, adding patient safety was a top priority.

"Due to concerns in the first deployment, patient safety and risk reduction activities have been incorporated into every aspect of [further] deployments," she said.

Speaking before senators, Mike Sicilia, executive vice president at Oracle said Cerner and the VA had already implemented system changes to reduce the number of orders going into the unknown queue and to better address those orders that were sent into it.

Oracle planned to increase automation and alerts, as well as improve workflow designed largely to "prevent orders from ever entering the unknown in the first place," he added.

During the next six to nine months, with the approval of the VA and the DoD, Oracle would migrate the Cerner solution to an Oracle second-generation cloud infrastructure datacenter at no extra cost, he said.

"If something isn't working for caregivers or patients, we plan to fix it first and work out the economics later. Patients and providers will always come first. We won't let contract wrangling get in the way," he said.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	07/27 Outcry: 9/11 families slam Saudi LIV golf
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/911-families-slam-saudi-backed-liv-golf-tournament/story?id=87489440

Terry Strada, the chair of the organization 9/11 Families United, which advocates for families of victims and survivors of the 2001 attacks, was shocked when she heard that the LIV Golf Tournament would be playing at the Bedminster Golf Course in Bedminster, New Jersey.

"I couldn't believe that it was actually going to be playing right there practically in my backyard," she told ABC News' podcast "Start Here."

Strada used to live in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, a few miles from the course where the international golf tournament will play over the weekend. Her husband, Tom Strada, was working in one of the World Trade Center towers and died during the attack.

Strada said that 17 families in Basking Ridge lost a family member during the 9/11 attacks and told ABC News the fact that the LIV Golf Tournament, which is sponsored by the Saudi Arabian government, is playing nearby hits too close to home.

"We're very disappointed in the players," she said. "We've tried to point out to them, I wrote them a letter when this all began."

For Strada, the connection between the Saudi Arabian government and the attacks on 9/11 is indisputable. "It is no longer alleged," Strada said. "We are in the courtrooms with a lawsuit against the kingdom."

"The kingdom actually provided the support network that was needed for the first arriving hijackers and most likely all of them to set up what they needed to plan, practice and carry out the attacks," she told "Start Here," citing President Joe Biden's executive order in 2021 that led to documents being declassified.

"We know that 15 of the 19 of them [9/11 hijackers] were Saudi nationals, but now we know there was this anti-American pro-jihadist program that was set up in the Saudi Embassy, and it was running out of the consulate out in California, and it was filled with extremists," Strada said.

The LIV Golf Tournament has raised eyebrows since it launched in London last month, with [critics calling it the latest example of "sportswashing,"](#) the process by which a group will launder its reputation with professional sporting events.

The golf tournament has managed to secure some of the biggest players in the game, and will travel across three countries in the following months.

The tournament first came under scrutiny because of the allegations of human rights violations against the kingdom, including the [2018 murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi](#).

Critics claimed that the kingdom is spending billions of dollars in order to improve its public image, and called on high-profile players such as Phil Mickelson to refuse to play.

The Bedminster golf course that is the site of the LIV Golf tournament is owned by former President Donald Trump, who "has been on record saying that he thinks this was a great move by the Saudis, that they've gotten great publicity," "Start Here" host Brad Mielke said in his conversation with Strada.

"They haven't done anything to make amends for the worst terrorist attack that ever happened on American soil," Strada told ABC News.

"They put a lot of money into our economy for all the same reasons, they just try to buy respect. And you can't buy respect. You have to earn it."

Strada registered her "huge disappointment" with Biden, saying 9/11 families tried unsuccessfully to secure a meeting with the president prior to his recent visit to Saudi Arabia. Strada said it was important for the families whose loved ones died on Sept. 11, 2001, to "get the justice that we deserve."

	"The kingdom has not been held accountable for the pipeline of money that they used to funnel terrorism. The kingdom needs to be held responsible and accountable for that," she said.
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HEADLINE	07/27 Europol: exploiting Covid misinformation
SOURCE	https://www.thejournal.ie/covid-19-terrorism-europol-5827060-Jul2022/
GIST	<p>VIOLENT TERRORIST GROUPS have shaped their propaganda using Covid-19 misinformation to “advance their narrative”, a Europol report has found.</p> <p>The EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) is produced by Europol on an annual basis and is used by police forces and policy makers across the European community to devise strategies against terrorists.</p> <p>As previously reported by <i>The Journal</i> the report outlined the arrest of 14 terror suspects in Ireland last year.</p> <p>The broader report, which examines the situation across Europe, looks at trends in terror groups and how they disseminate their information.</p> <p>The report found the groups were exploiting Covid-19 restrictions in order to grab the attention of people vulnerable to radicalisation.</p> <p>It said the pandemic lockdown measures, coupled with people’s increased online presence and a higher level of social isolation across the board “deepened individuals’ susceptibility to radicalisation”.</p> <p>“For those advocating extremist ideologies, the crisis has emerged as an opportunity to advance their narrative. From the onset of the pandemic, jihadist, but more notably right-wing, left-wing and anarchist terrorist and extremist groups, have framed COVID-19 themes in line with their respective ideology.</p> <p>“New topics of propaganda have been taken up by both right-wing and left-wing extremists during the pandemic, including conspiracy theories on the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation on the vaccination roll-out and allegations of mass surveillance by authorities.</p> <p>“Websites, blogs, social media and various encrypted messaging applications have played a major role in the dissemination of propaganda material during the crisis,” the report stated.</p> <p>The report authors also identified the gaming industry as a significant area where terrorists are targeting their propaganda.</p> <p>“The combination of social isolation and more time spent online during the pandemic has exacerbated the risks posed by violent extremist propaganda and terrorist content online, particularly among younger people and minors.</p> <p>“Gaming platforms and services are increasingly used by right-wing terrorists to channel terrorist propaganda targeting a younger generation of users. Pandemic-linked restrictions also have the potential to exacerbate pre-existing mental health issues potentially prompting violent acts that resemble terrorist or violent extremist attacks,” the report warned.</p> <p>The report said the most active group using Covid-19 as a recruiting tool was far right-wing factions but that all terror groups were also making moves in this area.</p> <p>While Jihadists, particularly al-Qaeda, particularly focus on use of messaging service RocketChat – there is also use of Telegram, WhatsApp, Element and Minds.</p>

	<p>The report does find some positives to be taken from the pandemic restrictions when it comes to terrorism – it found that the restrictions hampered physical activities such as networking, training, recruitment and weapons procurement.</p> <p>“Traditional terrorism financing activities and physical flows for circulating money were also disrupted.</p> <p>“Online financial services and virtual assets have become more prominent in terrorism financing, especially in the jihadist terrorist and right-wing extremist scene,” it said.</p> <p>The report did caution that rather than halting the activities it just delayed them.</p> <p>“Nonetheless, (preparation of) attacks and incidents continued despite the COVID-19 restrictions and, in some cases, the latter were motivated by it.</p> <p>“Extremist views and behaviours linked to anti-COVID-19 measures and antigovernment sentiments, but not associated with established terrorist and violent extremist ideologies, emerged in some Member States.</p> <p>“They were mostly noted in relation to groups formed loosely online, and materialised in threats made against politicians, government representatives, and health authorities.</p> <p>“They also threatened to harm the police at protests as well as vandalise COVID-19 vaccination and test locations,” it found.</p> <p>Croatia, Italy and the Netherlands were identified as particular hotspots for such activities with arrests for incitement to attack Government and parliament. There were also arrests for bomb and arson attacks on vaccination centres.</p> <p>The report found that previous Jihadist trends of chemical, biological and radiological weapons had continued but only in an indirect way.</p> <p>This content, rather than advocating for a biological weapon, was only disseminated in the body of other content.</p> <p>“Although the COVID-19 pandemic has placed bioterrorism under a spotlight, in the second year of the pandemic online propaganda and discussions in closed online forums on the possibility of weaponising a virus decreased,” it found.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Army Antiterrorism Awareness Month: Aug
SOURCE	https://www.army.mil/article/258801/august_is_army_antiterrorism_awareness_month
GIST	<p>FORT LEONARD WOOD, Mo. — Next month marks the 13th observance of Army Antiterrorism Awareness Month, when Army leaders work to instill heightened awareness and vigilance across the force to protect Army critical resources from acts of terrorism.</p> <p>The fact that the Army chooses a month to highlight the program, though, shouldn’t be seen as an indicator that individuals shouldn’t pay attention each day.</p> <p>There is a wide spectrum of threats to the Fort Leonard Wood community, including everything from weather and criminal activity to disgruntled employees and potential terrorist targeting. As risks and vulnerabilities are identified, mitigation measures are developed and emplaced. These plans are exercised routinely and monitored for effectiveness and ultimately result in a very comprehensive plan that lays a solid foundation for a safe community and an acceptable level of risk.</p>

Army Regulation 525-13 defines terrorism as the calculated use of violence, or the threat of violence, designed to strike fear in governments or society. Terrorism is usually related to politics, religion or ideology, and can be prevented if someone reports suspicious activities prior to the events.

Terrorism is sometimes carried out by foreign nationals, but homegrown violent extremists can also be to blame. Third parties usually witness activities or behaviors by HVEs that could trigger early intervention by community members or law enforcement. As of 2020, a U.S. government study found that bystanders witnessed or became aware of an HVE's violent extremist views or activities nearly 87 percent of the time. Encouraging increased reporting and intercession by third parties who observe behavior indicative of radicalization or mobilization to violence could improve the success of efforts to curb extremist acts in the US.

There are many variables currently impacting the potential risks we face, everything from politics to economics and, unfortunately, the bad guys are also vigilant and persistent. Together, however, everyone can make a difference, and Fort Leonard Wood has demonstrated and documented many examples of how someone taking the extra step to report something may have averted an incident of greater magnitude.

During the month of August, there will be a series of articles highlighting key points for awareness and measures for increasing awareness. A key element worth highlighting is the importance of community involvement. If something is out of place or doesn't look right, report it, and let the professionals take it from there.

Activities to report include:

- people drawing or measuring important buildings;
- strangers asking questions about security forces or procedures;
- a briefcase, suitcase, backpack or package left behind;
- cars or trucks left in No Parking zones in front of important buildings;
- intruders found in secure areas;
- a person wearing clothes that are too big and bulky and/or too hot for the weather;
- chemical smells or fumes that worry you;
- questions about sensitive information, such as building blueprints, security plans or senior leader travel schedules without a right or need to know; and
- purchasing supplies or equipment that can be used to make bombs or weapons, or purchasing uniforms without having the proper credentials.

How to make a report

Modeled after the Los Angeles Police Department's iWATCH program, iWATCH Army encourages and empowers the Army community to identify and report suspicious behavior potentially associated with terrorist activity. For more information on the program — or to make a report — call 573.596.6141, or visit the [Fort Leonard Wood iWATCH website](#).

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HEADLINE	07/27 DHS cleared after watchlist data exposed
SOURCE	https://www.nextgov.com/analytics-data/2022/07/dhs-cleared-after-2021-exposure-terrorist-watchlist-data/375025/
GIST	<p>The Office of the Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security issued an inspection report on Monday following the alleged exposure of DHS's terrorist watchlist data, which the department learned about in July of 2021.</p> <p>The report, entitled "DHS Has Controls to Safeguard Watchlist Data," was launched following the purported exposure of more than 1.9 million federal terrorist watchlist records. A social media post claimed that these watchlist records were exposed publicly online and contained sensitive information and identifier information. In response, OIG launched an investigation to determine if DHS effectively safeguarded and shared this terrorist screening data.</p>

	<p>As noted in the report, DHS uses and shares the terrorist screening data to fulfill its functions, such as counterterrorism, law enforcement, border security and inspections. The watchlist is shared across the U.S. government and other law enforcement agencies to identify known or suspected terrorists trying to enter the U.S., obtain visas or board an aircraft.</p> <p>According to the report, the OIG “determined the Department of Homeland Security has an approach to safeguard and share terrorist screening data.” It confirmed that the department’s policies and procedures are in compliance with federal standards to safeguard sensitive data, including the data of the alleged exposure, that is used, stored and shared by DHS.</p> <p>OIG also stated that DHS acted appropriately by promptly notifying the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Terrorist Screening Center, which owns the terrorist watchlist records. OIG added that DHS was not involved in the purported incident.</p> <p>DHS did not respond to OIG’s report, which does not offer any recommendations.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/28 Mali: terrorist attacks leave 66 dead
SOURCE	https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/terrorist-attacks-in-mali-leave-66-dead/2647408
GIST	<p>At least 66 people were killed in terrorist attacks Wednesday in several towns in Mali, according to security sources.</p> <p>"The Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) repelled terrorist attacks targeting positions in Savare, Sokolo and Kalumba early this Wednesday, July 27. The response, carried out with energy and professionalism, has enabled the attackers to be routed and pursued," Colonel Souleymane Dembele, the army’s director of information and public relations, said in a statement.</p> <p>A report on the fighting showed 54 dead, including six soldiers, and 25 soldiers wounded, including five seriously, in Sokolo in the region of Segou in south-central Mali, where a coordinated response was orchestrated against the attackers, who were routed.</p> <p>The same source also reported 12 dead "on the friendly side," including three civilians from a road construction company, following a "vigorously repelled" terrorist attack in Kalumba in the Nara region near the Mauritanian border.</p> <p>The sweep and assessment of the attack is still ongoing, according to the military authorities.</p> <p>"The aerial pursuit made it possible to attack terrorist logistical bases under cover of vegetation in the vicinity, thus reducing the enemy’s potential," Dembele added.</p> <p>On the central Mopti side, infiltration attempts targeted one of the checkpoints of a military camp as well as air force installations without success as suspicious movements were contained by FAMa.</p> <p>The attacks are part of a series that have targeted Malian army posts recently.</p> <p>On July 21, three soldiers and three terrorists were killed in simultaneous complex attacks in several locations.</p> <p>The following day, one soldier and seven terrorists were killed in a car bomb attack on the facility of the Directorate of Material, Hydrocarbons and Transport of the Armed Forces (DMHTA) in Kati near the capital Bamako.</p> <p>The attacks confirm the signals and clues previously detected and identified by the competent services and materialize the agony of the armed terrorist groups in Mali, according to military staff.</p>

	<p>"These armed groups are actually demonstrating their overall weakening by carrying out desperate actions of kamikaze attacks, actions on civilians, and the planting of improvised explosive devices," Dembele said.</p> <p>The military communication from the West African country, one of the most plagued by terrorist attacks in the Sahel for years, does not name the attacking terrorist group.</p> <p>One of the intelligence reports proves that one of the attackers is based in a neighboring country, according to the military body, which intends to "determine the connections and possible complicities" after investigations.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Nigeria: 2 more Chibok girls found
SOURCE	https://www.yahoo.com/news/nigeria-abductions-two-abducted-boko-162431601.html
GIST	<p>The Nigerian army says it has found two more of the female students abducted by Boko Haram militants from a secondary school more than eight years ago.</p> <p>There was global outrage when Islamists seized nearly 300 girls in Nigeria's north-eastern town of Chibok in 2014.</p> <p>Most of the victims have either been freed or escaped since then, but dozens remain unaccounted for. It appears the two hostages gave birth while in captivity, as the army said they were both found with children.</p> <p>One of the abductees was seen with a child, the other with two children.</p> <p>Other victims of the mass abduction have described being forced to convert to Islam and marry the group's fighters.</p> <p>The authorities said the "intercepted Chibok girls and their children" were in a military medical facility.</p> <p>Other abductees have been offered accommodation and rehabilitation by the Nigerian government following their freedom from Boko Haram.</p> <p>The two women were found on Monday during military operations against extremists in north-eastern Nigeria.</p> <p>In total, 276 girls seized were from their school dormitory in the middle of the night on 14 April 2014. Within hours of their kidnapping, 57 managed to escape mostly by jumping off the lorries and running off into the bushes.</p> <p>It was not until May 2016 that the first girl was found. A few others have also managed to escape over the years. Between 2016 and 2018, 103 of the victims were freed following negotiations between the Nigerian government and the militants.</p> <p>Campaign group Bring Back Our Girls says around 100 are still missing.</p> <p>Reports indicate that the militants have recently been abandoning their remaining captives, partly due to an intense multi-national military campaign against them.</p> <p>A long-running jihadist insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria has left 40,000 dead and 2.2 million displaced, according to the AFP news agency.</p> <p>Many other schools and universities in the region were attacked in the years following the 2014 Chibok kidnapping.</p>

	<p>Some of the assaults have been by jihadists - but more frequently by criminal groups known locally as "bandits", who engage in mass abduction for ransom.</p> <p>While the Nigerian government has reportedly paid Boko Haram some \$3.3m (£2.4m) as ransom for Chibok girls freed in negotiations, recent school kidnappings have seen little government involvement.</p> <p>Instead, parents and relatives have been left to pay the amounts demanded by the bandits for their children's release.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Suicide bombing in Somalia kills 11
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/africa-bombings-somalia-suicide-mogadishu-2d51274f2bdd3b3220c8f91d7ce00607
GIST	<p>MOGADISHU, Somalia (AP) — Witnesses say at least 11 people are dead after a suicide bomber blew himself up at the entrance to a government building in southern Somalia.</p> <p>District Commissioner Abdillahi Ali Waafow was among those killed in Wednesday's attack, the secretary-general of the Marka town administration in the Lower Shabelle region, Mohamed Osmaan Yariisoow, told The Associated Press by phone.</p> <p>"Minutes after we had concluded a meeting we had at the district headquarters and were on our way out, we found an unknown man approached us and blew himself up," Yariisoow said, adding that the commissioner's bodyguards, traditional elders and women also were killed.</p> <p>The Somalia-based extremist group al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack.</p> <p>Marka is about 100 kilometers south of Somalia's capital, Mogadishu.</p> <p>Witness Hassan Abdullahi confirmed to the AP by phone that 11 people including the district commissioner had been killed.</p> <p>"I heard a huge blast. I ran toward the explosion scene. I have seen with my own eyes several bodies and remains of human flesh scattered on the ground," he said.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	07/27 Posing as WSF worker, steals car off ferry
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/man-steals-womans-car-on-seattle-to-bainbridge-ferry/281-90dac677-aa17-457b-8666-8c9168195b56
GIST	<p>BAINBRIDGE ISLAND, Wash. — Police are searching for a suspect who allegedly stole a car while posing as an employee on the ferry from Seattle to Bainbridge Island, before crashing it in Poulsbo Tuesday night, according to the Washington State Patrol (WSP).</p> <p>While on board the Wenatchee, the suspect entered a Washington State Ferries employee's vehicle in an attempt to steal it, but was unsuccessful.</p> <p>The suspect took a ferry worker vest from the employee's car and approached a female driver, asking for her keys.</p> <p>The female driver reluctantly handed over her keys to the suspect, who then drove off in the car before law enforcement could arrive, according to WSP.</p> <p>The suspect fled the Bainbridge dock driving north on state Route 305 in a stolen 2006 Audi A3.</p>

	<p>The suspect later crashed into another vehicle at the intersection of SR 305 and SR 307 in Poulsbo. The driver and the passenger in the other car were both taken to a local hospital with serious injuries.</p> <p>The suspect fled from the scene of the crash and is still at large.</p> <p>An investigation is underway for a felony hit-and-run.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Potential deadly bacteria US soil first time
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/27/health/deadly-bacteria-us-soil-water.html
GIST	<p>A potentially deadly bacteria was found for the first time in water and soil samples in the United States, prompting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to alert doctors and public health experts throughout the country Wednesday to take it into consideration when examining patients.</p> <p>The bacteria, <i>Burkholderia pseudomallei</i>, was detected in the Gulf Coast region of southern Mississippi. Exposure to the bacteria can cause melioidosis, a “rare and serious disease,” according to the CDC; about 1 in every 4,600 people exposed are found to have the disease, according to a study from 2019. The study also found that about 90,000 people die annually from melioidosis.</p> <p>“Once well-established in the soil, <i>B. pseudomallei</i> cannot feasibly be removed from the soil,” the CDC wrote in its health advisory. “Public health efforts should focus primarily on improving identification of cases so that appropriate treatment can be administered.”</p> <p>The samples show that the bacteria has been present in the Mississippi region since at least 2020, when one person in the Gulf Coast region was found to have melioidosis, though it is unclear exactly how long <i>B. pseudomallei</i> has been in the area.</p> <p>The bacteria has previously been found in regions with tropical and subtropical climates around the world, like South and Southeast Asia, northern Australia and parts of Central and South America. The CDC said that modeling showed that southern Mississippi’s climate was also conducive to growing it.</p> <p>The environmental sampling in Mississippi was conducted after two patients in the area received diagnoses of melioidosis, two years apart — one in July 2020, the other in May 2022. The unnamed individuals were not related, the CDC said, but lived in “close geographical proximity,” and had not recently traveled out of the United States.</p> <p>Genomic sequencing data showed that both people had been infected by the same novel strain from the Western Hemisphere, officials said. Both patients were hospitalized and recovered after antibiotic therapy.</p> <p>Last month, the Mississippi State Department of Health and CDC collected environmental samples of soil, water and plant matter from the patients’ properties, household products and nearby areas they frequented.</p> <p>The bacteria can infect animals and people through direct contact or through cuts and wounds. The risk of spreading from person to person is low, officials said. Symptoms usually occur between one day to three weeks after exposure.</p> <p>Most melioidosis cases occur outside the United States, the CDC said. But last year, four people in four different states were infected with melioidosis after using contaminated aromatherapy spray sold at Walmart. Two of the four people died, officials said.</p> <p>Melioidosis symptoms are nonspecific and vary from person to person, the CDC said, but symptoms include fever, localized pain or swelling, chest pain and headaches. People with diabetes, excessive alcohol use, chronic lung disease, chronic kidney disease and immunosuppressive conditions are more susceptible to the bacteria. Officials said a quick diagnosis and antibiotics were crucial.</p>

	<p>B. pseudomallei isn't the only thing found in soil that can also cause illness.</p> <p>Valley fever, also called coccidioidomycosis, is an infection caused by a fungus that lives in the soil in the southwestern United States and parts of Mexico and Central and South America. It is contracted by breathing in the microscopic fungal spores from the air, although most people who breathe in the spores do not get sick, the CDC said. In 2019, about 20,000 cases were reported to the agency, most from people living in Arizona or California.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Out-of-control China rocket set to crash
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/chinese-rocket-will-crash-into-earth-sundaypossibly-into-a-populated-community?ref=home
GIST	<p>A used Chinese rocket booster is set to fall out of orbit and crash into Earth sometime in the next few days. The nonprofit Aerospace Corporation's debris tracking experts predict that the rocket—a 10-story, 23-ton core stage of a Long March 5B mission launched July 24 to deliver the Wentian lab module to the country's Tiangong space station—will careen to Earth on July 31 at 3:52 a.m. Eastern Time, plus or minus 22 hours.</p> <p>While the chance of the rocket hitting a populated community is slim, it's still possible. "Due to the uncontrolled nature of its descent, there is a non-zero probability of the surviving debris landing in a populated area—over 88 percent of the world's population lives under the reentry's potential debris footprint," the Aerospace Corporation said in a statement. About 60 to 80 percent of the booster's mass will burn up in the atmosphere, but that still leaves a hefty, fiery object ready to slam into the ground. This is the third time that a Long March 5B booster has fallen back to Earth uncontrollably and raised alarms. In May 2020, a booster crashed into an uninhabited plot of land on the African West Coast.</p> <p>The second Chinese booster incident, in May 2021, was more infamous. For several days, the space community had a harder time predicting and assessing where it would land. The world waited with bated breath for several hours until it was finally confirmed the booster landed in the Indian Ocean near the Maldives. NASA, among others, expressed severe irritation with the Chinese handling of the booster. (NASA did not respond to requests from The Daily Beast for immediate comment.)</p> <p>China's response over its uncontrolled boosters in the past has always ranged from complete silence to accusing the U.S. and others of scaremongering folks (which they've done again in response to this latest instance). Most core stages, reports Gizmodo, aren't supposed to reach orbit, and their trajectories are instead designed to guide them back to landing in the ocean or a very remote location on land. China, however, has consistently elected to send its Long March 5B core booster into orbit and let it tumble back to Earth willy-nilly.</p> <p>Debris trackers around the world will have a better sense in the next few days of where the booster may land Sunday, but it will still be tough to predict an exact location ahead of time. Sunday morning will be a tense time for a large swath of the world.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	07/27 Quiet couple in Hawaii are Russia spies?
SOURCE	https://www.wnnytv.com/2022/07/27/couple-who-lived-quietly-hawaii-years-were-actually-russian-spies-us-alleges/
GIST	HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow/Gray News) - A couple living quietly in Hawaii for years were actually Russian spies, federal agents with the state Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security Service allege.

Walter Glenn Primose, also known as Bobby Edward Fort, and Gwynn Darle Morrison, aka Julie Lyn Montague, were arrested in a raid Friday morning, [HawaiiNewsNow](#) reported.

Government records said the couple assumed the identities of dead babies from Texas in the 1980s, then used those identities to obtain Social Security cards, passports and driver's licenses. Both are charged with identity theft, lying on their passport applications and conspiracy to commit crimes against the United States.

Retired FBI agent Tom Simon, who owns an investigative firm called Simon Worldwide Investigations, believes these are preliminary charges designed to "get these people off the streets and begin negotiating with them and seeing what they know and their willingness to cooperate with the U.S."

Pictures included in the court records show Primrose and Morrison in uniforms that the government said belonged to the KGB, the former Soviet Union spy agency.

The criminal complaint said Primrose fraudulently enlisted in the Coast Guard in 1994.

"The Coast Guard has one foot firmly planted in the world of law enforcement and the second foot in the U.S. military and the intel community," Simon said.

Attorney Kevin O'Grady, a former military prosecutor, said Primrose's security clearance could have provided the Russians with valuable information.

"They engage in counter terrorism and counter drug operations and things like that," he said.

Primrose worked as an avionic electrical technician, serving 22 years before retiring.

"Enough information disclosed publicly can enable the enemy to put pieces together and that can tell the enemy a lot about us," O'Grady said.

After retiring from the Coast Guard in 2016, Primrose was working as a U.S. Department of Defense contractor until his arrest Friday.

"It's absolutely staggering to me the amount of time and effort the Russians put into this particular project," Simon said, referring to the criminal allegations. "This was not a quick hit to steal some records to get back. This was decades in the making."

Neighbors said the couple lived in the Kapolei community in Honolulu for many years, keeping a low profile.

Neighbor Joshua Guieb-Pangan said they were friendly.

"When we would drive by, they'd always give us a wave," Pangan said.

He was shocked when agents raided the home last week.

"There was a lot of FBI members around the house and in the house," Pangan said.

The government is asking that the couple be held without bond, calling them a flight risk.

A judge will decide on that request on Thursday.

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HEADLINE	07/27 CBP, Coast Guard seize 10tons khat
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/cbp/cbp-u-s-coast-guard-seize-more-than-10-tons-of-khat/

GIST	<p>A joint effort between U.S. Homeland Security Agencies, Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Coast Guard within the Seattle Maritime Port led to the seizure of more than 20,000 pounds of dried khat with an estimated street value of \$3.6 million.</p> <p>The khat, which was destined for the United States, was shipped from Kenya as tea. It is the largest seizure in the Puget Sound area. Khat is a plant native in Africa and contains cathinone which causes stimulation and excitement. Its leaves are chewed or dried for tea. Cathinone is known to be very addictive and has been classified as a controlled substance in the United States since May 1987.</p> <p>On May 27, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers and U.S. Coast Guard at the Port of Seattle conducted an exam on a container that appeared to contain khat. Samples were extracted from the container and sent to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Laboratories and Scientific Services confirmed the next day by Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. The analysis returned presumptive results of Cathinone, a Schedule I, controlled substance. In total, CBP officers seized 623 boxes of khat with a total weight of approximately 20,215 pounds. The shipment was manifested as dried tea leaves from Kenya and destined to Seattle. CBP officers seized the khat for proper storage pending destruction.</p> <p>“This khat seizure demonstrates Customs and Border Protection officers’ effectiveness, dedication and expertise searching through the tens of thousands of international containers to find the proverbial needle in the haystack,” said J. Rene Ortega, CBP’s Port Director for the Area Port of Seattle. “Khat remains illegal to import into the United States and CBP officers will continue to seize khat and all illicit substances that pose a threat. Drug interdiction at our nation’s borders is one of many ways in which CBP helps to keep our communities safe.”</p> <p>“This seizure underscores the importance of inter-agency cooperation,” said Capt. Patrick Hilbert, Sector Puget Sound Commander. “The Coast Guard and Customs and Border Patrol frequently train and operate together to safeguard our borders. This success is a direct result of that cooperation.”</p> <p>Khat is a green, leafy plant typically grown in the Arabian Peninsula and many parts of Africa. It is chewed for its stimulant effect. The World Health Organization classified khat as a drug of abuse in 1980.</p> <p>The Drug Enforcement Administration classifies khat as a Schedule I narcotic – the most restrictive category used by the DEA – when the leaves are freshly picked. Its principal components, cathine and cathinone, are considered controlled substances in the United States.</p> <p>CBP routinely conducts enforcement operations on international passengers and cargo and searches for narcotics, unreported currency, weapons, prohibited agriculture, and other illicit products.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Arrests: sabotage radiation alert system
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/spain-arrests-suspected-hackers-who-sabotaged-radiation-alert-system/
GIST	<p>The Spanish police have announced the arrest of two hackers believed to be responsible for cyberattacks on the country's radioactivity alert network (RAR), which took place between March and June 2021.</p> <p>The two arrested individuals are former workers of a company contracted by the General Directorate of Civil Protection and Emergencies (DGPGE) to maintain the RAR system, so they had a deep knowledge of its operation and how to deliver an effective cyberattack.</p> <p>The two arrested individuals gained illegitimate access to DGPGE's network and attempted to delete the RAR management web application in the control center.</p> <p>In parallel, the duo launched individual attacks against sensors, taking down 300 out of 800 spread across Spain, essentially breaking their link to the control center and disrupting the data exchange.</p>

The cybersabotage against RAR stopped in June 2021 after authorities discovered the breach and initiated an immediate investigation with the help of the cybercrime unit of the National Police.

Eventually, after a year of following the hackers' traces, the police could locate those responsible for the cyberattack.

"A year of investigations and an exhaustive technical police analysis of all the communications of the sabotaged sensors, as well as the data related to the intrusion in the computer system whose origin could be located in the public use network of a well-known establishment of hospitality in the center of Madrid, allowed to identify the authors of the cyberattack." - [Policia National](#)

"In the same operation, carried out in Madrid and San Agustín de Guadalix, two homes and one company were searched, under the protection of two orders of the Investigating Court No. 39 of Madrid; finding numerous computer and communications devices related to the facts investigated," reads the police's announcement.

Grave risk

Spain operates seven nuclear reactors in six power plants in Cáceres, Tarragona, Valencia, Guadalajara, Salamanca, and Córdoba, covering roughly 20% of its national power needs with the program.

The role of the RAR system is to detect sudden rises in radioactivity levels and raise the alarm to help the authorities take protection measures, detect, and remediate the problem.

RAR comprises 800 gamma radiation sensors deployed at specific points in the country, each connected via a telephone line to the control center at the DGPCE headquarters.

The cyberattack prevented 300 of these sensors from transmitting their readings back to the center, introducing a severe risk of the state not responding immediately to events of excessive radiation.

No further details have been provided in the police's announcement, so the reason behind the sabotage is unclear.

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HEADLINE	07/27 Whatcom Co. drug probe nets 11 arrests
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/twelve-arrested-in-whatcom-county-drug-trafficking-investigation
GIST	<p>BELLINGHAM, Wash. — Twelve people, 11 in Washington state, were arrested this week in a massive drug bust investigation.</p> <p>The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) Gang and Drug Task Force, along with the DEA Bellingham Resident Office have been looking into the drug organization in the Pacific Northwest.</p> <p>Detectives and agents both executed 12 federal search warrants, with 11 of those in Washington. One was in California.</p> <p>The searches turned up 12 suspects, with two already federally indicted.</p> <p>It also led to officials finding 34 guns, 50,000 fentanyl pills, seven kilograms of fentanyl powder, two pounds of methamphetamine, three ounces of cocaine, one vehicle and \$58,000 in cash.</p> <p>Here are the suspects identified so far who are facing state drug charges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loren Walker, Bellingham, 54• William Fife, Bellingham, 67• Brian Corbett, Bellingham, 50• Steven Binschus, Bellingham, 58• Christina Hein, Bellingham, 44• Yvette Bailey, Ferndale, 54

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Bohannon, Bellingham, 58 • Amanda Lawrence, Blaine, 44 • Gregory Hite, Bellingham, 62
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HEADLINE	07/27 Police: scam; pretend to play violin for cash
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/scammers-pretending-to-play-violin-for-money-a-nationwide-issue-police-say-united-states-target-portage-michigan-license-plates-texas-virginia-illinois-maryland-connecticut-music-bow-strings-speaker-wwmt-springfield-township-oakland-county
GIST	<p>PORTAGE, Mich. (WWMT) — Police across the United States are warning the public about people pretending to play violins to solicit donations.</p> <p>After getting a tip from a concerned viewer, WWMT found a man appearing to play the violin outside a Target store in Portage, Michigan, Monday afternoon. As he performed, he stood next to a sign that read, "DAD WITH 3 KID PLEASE NEED HELP FOR FOOD AND RENT."</p> <p>When the reporters approached him and asked about his performance, a woman sitting beside him said they didn't speak English. As the man was holding his violin down, with his bow away from the strings, violin music began playing from his speaker.</p> <p>After telling the man some people were concerned about him pretending to play the violin to solicit money, WWMT asked him for his perspective. He responded he did not speak English. WWMT noted his sign asking for donations was written in English and asked him who made the sign. The man then packed up and left the shopping center without further comment.</p> <p>Police and officials across the country have been warning the public about similar performers.</p> <p>The supervisor of Springfield Township in Oakland County, Michigan, made a Facebook post Monday, urging residents to be careful with their money.</p> <p>"This is a nationwide problem and we're addressing it at our Davisburg Kroger," said Springfield Township Supervisor Laura Moreau in her post.</p> <p><i>These are not your neighbors in need (we've seen license plates from Texas, Virginia and Illinois) and they aren't real musicians (the violin music is recorded). Please call Sheriff's dispatch if you see this scam and do not reward them with a donation!!</i></p> <p>Several police departments have alerted their communities about similar performers as well, including police in Florida.</p> <p>"Recently, myself, along with members of the Community Policing Unit, have encountered individuals attempting this scam at many local shopping centers," said Cpl. James Gatti with the Pinellas Park Police Department in a November Facebook post. "Please be smart and safe with your hard-earned money."</p> <p>Police in Maryland also chimed in.</p> <p>"WARNING: This is a nationwide issue, please be aware of scam violin players in Rockville and other locations' shopping centers," the Montgomery County Department of Police (MCDP) said in a December tweet. "They are soliciting money through cash AND electronic methods. "</p> <p>MCDP later tweeted that while the department does not enforce panhandling laws, it cautioned that the claims of the performers – such as being homeless or having a sick relative – are usually untrue.</p> <p>"MCPD cannot discourage anyone from giving money, but does offer a word of warning to be cautious, especially if using phone apps," the police department said.</p>

	<p>Other law enforcement agencies that have warned the public include the Norwalk Police Department in Connecticut.</p> <p>"If you want to provide money that will go to people who need it, please donate to established, confirmed programs that will truly support the needy," the Norwalk Police Department posted on Facebook in December.</p> <p>Viewers told WWMT the man who pretended to play the violin outside the Michigan Target has performed outside other shopping centers throughout the county.</p> <p>The public information officer for the city of Kalamazoo said street musicians are required to get a permit, and it is <i>illegal</i> to solicit money on private property without the owner's permission.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Smash-grab thieves hit Seattle jewelry store
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/thieves-target-seattle-jewelry-store-during-overnight-smash-and-grab-heist
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A longtime antique jewelry store near Seattle's Pike Place Market was picking up the pieces Wednesday after being targeted during an overnight smash-and-grab.</p> <p>The suspects got away after clearing out antique jewelry cases in just a matter of minutes, only leaving behind an SUV that is now in police custody.</p> <p>"We can't open," Isadoras Antique Jewelry owner and manager said Wednesday. "All of the cases are broken. All of the doors are broken. [They took] antique jewelry, lots of gold of course, and whatever they could do in the three or four minutes they were here, they did."</p> <p>The store owner, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said she believes the suspects are the same people who tried breaking in through the store's front door last weekend.</p> <p>It's a devastating hit to business during the busy tourist season, and a loss of precious jewelry the owner hand picks with her mother.</p> <p>"Most of the jewelry in here is 100 to 200 years old," she said. "So, its historical, it's craftsmanship."</p> <p>She expects it to be weeks before the front window can be replaced due to a glass shortage, which will determine when they can reopen.</p> <p>"The amount of break-ins in the city are just consuming wood and glass and it's just not a good time to be broken into because you're going to wait," she said.</p> <p>This family business says this won't stop them from leaving this iconic corner where they've been for 15 years, but they want something to be done to help clean up downtown at night.</p> <p>"Our friends, our neighbors - this has happened to a lot of people down here," she explained.</p> <p>This store owner supports the city's plan to hire and retain more officers, which she believes will help.</p> <p>In the meantime, the merchant said she is in talks with the nearby hotel about other possible security measures like roll-down gates or hiring security guards.</p> <p>"Seattle's an incredible city and we have to save it. We have to keep going in the right direction," she said.</p> <p>It's unclear if police have any suspect leads or if the suspects or vehicles involved are connected to other crimes.</p>

	Seattle police said Wednesday that it has recently focused additional resources in downtown, but for safety reasons couldn't provide specific shift staffing numbers.
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HEADLINE	07/27 Parkland shooting: 2 injured, 80 shots fired
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/parkland-home-riddled-with-gunfire-man-critically-hurt-12-year-old-grazed/6AZMD63TGVEOZEYROYN6GP4O4/
GIST	<p>PARKLAND, Wash. — A Pierce County family is in shock after their home was shot up, caught in the crossfire of what investigators believe is a gang-related shooting.</p> <p>The facade of the house is riddled with holes. A 12-year-old girl inside was grazed by one of the stray bullets and there were several other close calls.</p> <p>The shooting happened at 98th Street South and Ainsworth Street South in Parkland shortly after 1:30 a.m. on Wednesday.</p> <p>Investigators say one home in that neighborhood has been tied to multiple shootings just this week, about a block away at 97th Street South.</p> <p>Neighbors say they heard rapid fire erupt overnight.</p> <p>“All of a sudden I heard, grrrrrr grrrr grrrr. Automatic weapons being fired,” said Jimmy C. Johnson Jr., who lives in Parkland.</p> <p>Tofi Lomu said the shooting woke her up — and she quickly realized her home was getting hit.</p> <p>“That’s when I yelled, where are you?” Lomu said, shouting to her grandkids. “By the time I was calling them they were already under the table,” Lomu said, wiping away tears.</p> <p>Her grandkids were just on the other side of the wall that’s covered with about 30 bullet holes. Lomu says her 12-year-old granddaughter was just coming out of the bathroom when a bullet flew straight at her.</p> <p>“One of those grazed her right on her belly. Thank God it didn’t go straight inside,” Lomu said. “Would’ve killed her,” she said.</p> <p>One person apparently involved in the incident is a 19-year-old man from Tacoma, according to the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department. He was in a car that slammed into a church fence across the street.</p> <p>He was shot and rushed to the hospital in critical condition. Deputies found a rifle in his vehicle, but are waiting on a warrant to confirm the type of gun and determine how the young man was involved.</p> <p>“What we think that happened is that vehicle pulled in first, probably started shooting at the people in the street and they returned fire,” said Sgt. Darren Moss with the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department. Moss said deputies recovered more than 80 shell casings.</p> <p>It’s the third shooting in the neighborhood within a week — deputies responded to shooting calls on Sunday, Monday, and again on Wednesday, to incidents likely all connected with one home.</p> <p>“It’s just really a terrible incident to see this kind of violence. This clearly seems to be gang-related, retaliation of some sort,” Moss said. “Having three shootings in that one residence in a two-and-a-half day period is just ridiculous,” he said.</p>

	<p>A KIRO 7 crew who was on the scene Wednesday morning saw young people, some with their faces covered, hopping the fence of the home allegedly involved. Our crew captured cellphone video of a group running away.</p> <p>Now the sheriff's department is now comparing that cellphone video to surveillance video from the area as part of an evidence review.</p> <p>"It's just reckless and it's endangering everyone," Moss said.</p> <p>The traumatized family caught in the crossfire says all the gun violence has them considering leaving Parkland.</p> <p>"That's why I'm thinking about moving back to the islands. I'm from American Samoa. We don't have this kind of stuff," Lomu said. "I'm thinking what's the use of having a good education ... if it's going to kill them?" she said.</p> <p>Moss says he is also concerned that there could be more gang-related retaliation as investigators work on making arrests.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Pierce Co. car thefts exploded in 2021
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article258623788.html
GIST	<p>When Cody Limas moved to Washington last year, it was not a warm welcome. His Jeep was stolen twice in two months.</p> <p>The 34-year-old hadn't even moved into his home before thieves targeted him in October, stealing his Jeep Wrangler and the attached U-Haul from a Fife hotel parking lot. He lost all of his and his children's possessions, including irreplaceable military memorabilia from his time in the U.S. Army.</p> <p>The 2018 Jeep Wrangler was recovered a week later but again stolen from outside his Tacoma townhouse in December.</p> <p>Police found the suspected car thief but only issued a citation since the COVID-19 pandemic has restricted booking at Pierce County Jail to mostly those suspected of violent crimes.</p> <p>The ordeal has cost Limas about \$5,000. His family's personal items from the U-Haul were never recovered.</p> <p>"It broke my heart when the Jeep was taken but all the personal stuff, all the priceless stuff — you can't get back all the memories," Limas said. "It messed me up financially so they could joy ride and go on a crime spree."</p> <p>Limas is hardly alone.</p> <p>Motor vehicle theft has been steadily rising across the state. Last year, it reached the highest level since 2007.</p> <p>Crime statistics tell an unsettling story. In 2021, auto theft jumped 66 percent in Tacoma. Theft of car parts spiked 83 percent, mostly due to catalytic converters. Motor vehicle theft went up 50 percent in Pierce County. Auto theft increased 17 percent statewide, with Pierce and King counties leading the way.</p> <p>The number of people arrested for stealing cars was not immediately available, but the number of charges filed in Pierce County for stealing cars or possessing stolen cars more than doubled.</p> <p>In the last five months of 2021, local law enforcement say car thefts "exploded" by more than 50 percent.</p>

“This change is unprecedented and leads to the highest (annual) number of stolen cars in Washington since WATPA started work in 2007,” according to the annual report for Washington Auto Theft Prevention Authority.

The agency says 31,032 vehicles were stolen across the state last year, compared to 26,520 in 2020.

It’s a problem that’s been getting worse for about two years in many states.

“Auto thefts saw a dramatic increase in 2020 versus 2019 in part due to the pandemic, an economic downturn, law enforcement realignment, depleted social and schooling programs, and, in still too many cases, owner complacency,” said David Glawe, president and CEO of the National Insurance Crime Bureau.

There were 880,595 cars stolen nationwide in 2020, up from 794,019 the year before. That means a vehicle was stolen every 36 seconds.

Data for 2021 has not yet been released.

The agency ranked Washington No. 8 for having the worst auto-theft rate (number of vehicles stolen per 100,000 residents). California, Texas and Florida top the list, accounting for 37 percent of all car thefts across the country.

Owner complacency is a factor contributing to auto theft that can be controlled, experts say. Too many people leave their keys or car fobs in the vehicle, or let the engine warm up unattended on cold mornings.

There were 84,131 vehicles stolen with the keys inside in 2019, a sizable increase from the 82,369 in 2018, according to the National Insurance Crime Bureau.

WHY IS CAR THEFT SO HIGH?

Local law enforcement officials think new legislation on policing is partially to blame for Pierce County’s spike in car thefts.

House Bill 1054, which was signed into law in May by Gov. Jay Inslee, bans police from using chokeholds, neck restraints, no-knock warrants and some military gear, like tear gas. It also says officers and deputies can engage in pursuits only if there is probable cause to arrest somebody for a serious crime like murder, rape or drive-by shooting. Probable cause is a higher standard of proof than reasonable suspicion, which is what they used before the new law.

Pierce County Prosecutor Mary Robnett said she has no doubt the new rules are limiting police pursuits and contributing to the rise in car thefts.

“It’s much harder for police to identify a suspect if reasonable suspicion isn’t enough to detain someone while they investigate. And even if there is probable cause, the people stealing these cars likely know the police can’t pursue them,” Robnett told The News Tribune. “Both of those factors mean a lower percentage of these cases will ever have an identified suspect. It also means fewer car thieves will be held accountable.”

Although Robnett’s office last year filed more criminal charges related to stolen vehicles than in recent years, prosecutors said the charging numbers would be higher if police were able to freely do their jobs and have been lobbying legislators to amend the law.

In 2021, Pierce County prosecutors charged 726 counts of theft of a motor vehicle and possession of a stolen motor vehicle. That’s a 52 percent jump from 2020 when 348 counts were filed for those crimes.

In the last seven years, only 2016 came close to the last year’s numbers when 632 counts related to stealing a car or possessing a stolen car were filed.

The Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force also believes the new laws are to blame for the increase in crime.

“Auto theft is a huge problem right now in WA, especially in Pierce County,” the agency tweeted in January. “The latest LE (law enforcement) reform bills and jail booking restrictions have made enforcing auto theft crimes difficult.”

In December alone, 915 vehicles were stolen in Pierce County, the task force said. That’s a huge jump from the 435 stolen in December 2020.

Car thieves also have started targeting car dealerships. In February, a Frederickson auto dealer had 19 vehicles taken from its lot. All but one have been recovered.

Pierce County sheriff’s Sgt. Darren Moss said it’s usually the same people stealing the vast majority of cars. They’re arrested and released because of jail booking restrictions, and deputies say they pick them up within a day or two in another stolen vehicle.

Auto theft spiked at the end of year “after the criminals started figuring out we couldn’t chase them,” Moss said. “It’s frustrating when you put restrictions on the laws and what we’re allowed to do. People don’t steal cars to drive from Point A to Point B. They use them to commit other crimes and sometimes those crimes are violent.”

UPTICK IN CAR THEFTS BEGAN IN 2020

Although car thefts soared last year, they began rising in 2020 around the time the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

In Tacoma, there were 2,169 vehicles stolen in 2020, according to FBI data. That’s up from 1,699 in 2019. Pierce County didn’t see as big of an increase going from 1,095 in 2019 to 1,145 in 2020.

Tacoma police recovered 1,132 stolen cars valued at \$5,301,385 in 2020. Pierce County deputies recovered 635 stolen vehicles that same year.

Some recovered cars are so badly scrapped or damaged that they are considered a total loss. Other times, owners like Limas and Shane Johns choose to pay for the damages and keep the vehicle.

Johns is the head brewer at E9 Brewing Co. and spent six weeks waiting for repairs to be completed on a delivery van stolen from in front of the Tacoma business in November.

“It actually took longer to get the parts in and get it fixed than the van was gone for,” he said. “It impacted our ability to deliver product and be selling at the same time.”

He thinks the car thieves did surveillance on the brewery before stealing one of four vans because they were able to elude two security cameras out front. They took the van about 4 a.m. from its parking spot in front of E9.

Eight minutes later, the delivery van was used to burglarize a construction site. Ten days after that, the van was found stripped and abandoned in Auburn. The thieves had stripped off the company’s stickers, taken the catalytic converter and seriously damaged the interior and electrical system.

Robnett, the prosecuting attorney, said those types of situations are making Pierce County residents feel unsafe.

“Auto theft may be ‘low-level’ crime, but don’t tell that to someone who has just had their car stolen,” she said. “It’s an economic hit but also a huge disruption to their lives. This issue is contributing to the growing sense of lawlessness out there.”

HEADLINE	07/27 Uvalde principal defends actions, security
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/27/us/uvalde-robb-elementary-principal-mandy-gutierrez/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)Robb Elementary Principal Mandy Gutierrez defended herself Wednesday against criticism about her handling of school security before the massacre that left 19 children and two teachers dead.</p> <p>In an exclusive interview with CNN, Gutierrez was asked whether she agreed with a legislative report that cited a "culture of non-compliance with safety policies" at the school.</p> <p>"Absolutely not," Gutierrez said in response.</p> <p>"Anytime that an alert went out, every single teacher on that campus took it to mean it could be a potential escalating situation," she said.</p> <p>Gutierrez said she immediately initiated a lockdown with an app called Raptor after hearing that an armed man had jumped a school fence.</p> <p>"I feel that I followed the training that I was provided with to the best of my abilities," she said when asked whether she felt she should lose her job. "And I will second guess myself for the rest of my life."</p> <p>Texas Department of Public Safety Director Col. Steven McCraw last month called the police response an "abject failure." He placed sole blame for the failure to engage the gunman on school district police chief Pedro "Pete" Arredondo, who officials have identified as the on-scene commander.</p> <p>Arredondo, who is on unpaid administrative leave, has previously said that he did not consider himself to be incident commander that day.</p> <p>Asked about the law enforcement delay in confronting the shooter, Gutierrez said she is frustrated but not in a position to find fault.</p> <p>"I'm not law enforcement and I cannot pass judgment and tell them how to do their jobs, just like I would not ask them to tell me how to do mine," she said. "I don't feel that I'm in a position to blame anyone."</p> <p>Gutierrez added, "I would blame things that are out of my circle of control, which is I don't get to make the laws. So I don't get to, I don't get to decide how old you have to be to purchase a firearm. I don't get to decide how many rounds of ammunition somebody can purchase. I don't get to determine the amount of security that we have available on campus."</p> <p>Principal was 'under the impression that my staff and my students were all safe' The principal said she prayed during the shootings and siege that followed.</p> <p>"I wanted everyone to exit safely," she said. "I did not want to leave until I was reassured that all of my staff and all of my students were out and safe. Up until that very last moment, I was still under the impression that my staff and my students were all safe."</p> <p>Gutierrez has been placed on administrative leave with pay, according to her attorney, Ricardo Cedillo. The school board did not comment on her leave at a Monday meeting. Gutierrez, who started as a fourth grade teacher in 2008, has worked for Uvalde CISD for more than two decades.</p> <p>In a letter to members of the House Committee that investigated the shooting, Gutierrez disputed several of their findings. She said the door to room 111 -- one of two classroom where the victims were killed -- was checked by custodial staff every evening, including the night before the shooting. She also wrote she has no recollection of the teacher in that room complaining about the door not locking, according to the letter, which was released by her attorney Wednesday.</p>

"What I know for a fact is that the door to room 111 did in fact lock," she said in the interview. "And the reason I know that is we conduct regular walk throughs of the campus and I have myself used my master key to unlock that door."

Arnulfo Reyes, who taught in room 111, told CNN that Gutierrez's claims in her letter about the door locking mechanism are not entirely accurate. He said he did not complain about the door being locked, but rather about the door getting jammed or stuck throughout the day.

Reyes said he complained about the door getting jammed several times over three years. Reyes said the door was locked during the day and was normally locked when he arrived at the school. Asked if he remembers the door being locked the day of the shooting, Reyes said he does not recall.

Gutierrez in her letter acknowledged problems with spotty Wi-Fi at Robb. She wrote that she did not use the PA system the day of the shooting because her training was that its use could "create a panic." She denied the existence of a "culture of complacency" at the school and said it's "unfair & inaccurate" to conclude she was complacent about security.

Gutierrez said in the letter she "will live with the horror of these events for the rest of my life" and that she wants to keep her job "to be on the front lines helping children who survived, the families of all affected, and the entire Uvalde community."

State Rep. Dustin Burrows, the committee chairman, said in a statement that he had not received Gutierrez's letter.

"The committee relied upon the testimony of interviews of multiple employees of the Uvalde CISD (including staff and administration) and the Uvalde CISD Police Department in coming to its conclusions related to the practices that took place at Robb Elementary School," Burrows said.

A spokesperson for the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District, citing a high volume of media requests, asked for at least two days to respond.

Report says principal and administrators knew about faulty lock

Gutierrez's leave came as Uvalde officials sought to reassure frustrated parents about the safety of their children when classes resume.

The [Uvalde massacre](#) was America's [deadliest school shooting](#) since 2012.

The [legislative committee report](#) on the May 24 school shooting cited Robb Elementary's "culture of non-compliance with safety policies," including its failure to adequately prepare for the risk of an armed intruder and the common practice of leaving doors unlocked.

The report said Gutierrez and school administrators knew a lock to one of the classrooms where the killings occurred did not work properly and failed to repair it.

The day of the shooting, Gutierrez was in her office after an awards ceremony and attempted to initiate a lockdown on the Raptor app but "had difficulty making the alert because of a bad wi-fi signal," according to the legislative report. She also did not attempt to "communicate the lockdown alert over the school's intercom," the report said.

School personnel "frequently propped doors open and deliberately circumvented locks," according to the legislative report. This behavior was "tacitly condoned" by school administrators and district police -- and not treated as "serious infractions."

Locking doors as required could have slowed the gunman's "progress for a few precious minutes—long enough to receive alerts, hide children, and lock doors; and long enough to give police more opportunity

	<p>to engage and stop the attacker before he could massacre 19 students and two teachers," the Texas House report stated.</p> <p>Legislators also faulted the police response and the failure of school officials and others to heed numerous warning signs about the shooter. Their report said state and federal officers on scene were equally culpable for the delay in confronting the shooter.</p> <p>Uvalde school officials on Monday disclosed efforts to improve security when classes resume early next month. Plans include the installation of bulletproof windows and metal detectors, the hiring of 10 additional police officers, and the identification of one point of entry for each school. Five officers were employed by the district at the time of the shooting, according to the legislative report.</p>
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HEADLINE	07/27 Ex-cops Floyd case sentenced to prison
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/cops-convicted-george-floyds-death-set-sentenced/story?id=87427866
GIST	<p>Two former police officers convicted on federal charges in the death of George Floyd were both sentenced Wednesday to prison terms.</p> <p>Former Minneapolis police officers J. Alexander Kueng and Tou Thao were sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Paul Magnuson in back-to-back hearings.</p> <p>Magnuson, who noted that Kueng was a rookie cop at the time of Floyd's death, sentenced him to serve three years in federal prison, followed by two years of supervised release, according to St. Paul ABC affiliate KSTP.</p> <p>In a separate hearing, Magnuson sentenced Thao, who had been a nine-year veteran of the Minneapolis Police Department at the time of Floyd's death, to 3 1/2 years in prison, also followed by two years of supervised release, KSTP reported.</p> <p>Kueng was sentenced first in U.S. District Court in St. Paul, Minnesota.</p> <p>Prior to Kueng being sentenced, Floyd's cousin Sabrina Montgomery and his girlfriend, Courtney Ross, gave victim impact statements.</p> <p>Ross addressed Kueng directly with compassion, telling him, "This sentence will not define you," and urging him to "define your purpose," KSTP reported.</p> <p>"This does not mean you cannot find your footing to stand up for what's right in the future," Ross told Kueng.</p> <p>Montgomery asked Magnuson to give both Kueng and Thao the maximum sentence.</p> <p>"All of these men deserve to serve longer sentences," Montgomery said, according to KSTP. "The system these officers operated in is flawed, but again, where is their humanity?"</p> <p>Assistant U.S. Attorney Manda Sertich told Magnuson that Kueng, who was a rookie cop at the time of Floyd's death, admitted during his trial testimony that he was aware that it was his duty to intervene, but he failed to act.</p> <p>"All he had to do per MPD policy was attempt to intervene ... but he didn't say a word. Not one word," Sertich said, according to KSTP.</p> <p>Kueng declined to make a statement in court before he was sentenced. But his attorney, Thomas Plunkett, spoke on his behalf, telling Magnuson, "He's a nice young man that attempted to help the community by taking on a difficult role ... and now he's being sentenced for that."</p>

Both Kueng, 28, and Thao, 35, were convicted by a federal jury in February along with their former police colleague Thomas Lane, 39, who received a sentence last week of 2 1/2 years in prison for violating Floyd's civil rights.

Federal prosecutors had asked for a sentence of 6 1/2 years for Lane, which according to federal sentencing guidelines, was the maximum.

All three men were convicted of using the "color of the law," or their positions as police officers, to deprive Floyd of his civil rights by willfully being indifferent to his serious medical needs.

During Thao's sentencing hearing, Montgomery again asked for the maximum sentence. Ross also spoke at Thao's sentencing, but did not offer him words of encouragement like she did when she addressed Kueng and called for a maximum sentence.

"Mr. Thao, as you watched my love being suffocated under the knee of your co-officer, I will never forget you saying to the onlookers, 'This is why you don't do drugs,'" said Ross, citing video played at the officers' trial.

Thao's lawyer, Robert Paule, described Thao as "a decent person who was just trying to do his job."

Thao gave a statement in court, telling Magnuson he found God after being arrested in Floyd's death and saying that he had learned to lean on his faith.

Prosecutors said Kueng, Thao and Lane, who was also a rookie cop, all failed to intervene as the handcuffed, unarmed 46-year-old Black man was pinned under the knee of their senior officer, Derek Chauvin, for more than nine minutes on May 25, 2020, outside a Minneapolis convenience store where Floyd was accused of using a phony \$20 bill to buy cigarettes.

Thao and Kueng were also convicted of violating Floyd's right to be free of an unreasonable seizure by willfully failing to intervene to prevent Chauvin from applying bodily injury to Floyd.

Prosecutors had requested a "substantially higher" federal sentence than Lane's, but far less than what Chauvin received.

Chauvin was sentenced on Thursday by Magnuson to serve 21 years in prison after pleading guilty in December to violating Floyd's civil rights and admitting he kept his knee on Floyd's neck even after he became unresponsive. Chauvin also pleaded guilty to depriving a then-14-year-old boy of his constitutional right to be free from the use of unreasonable force by an officer, which resulted in bodily injury to the teen, according to the Justice Department.

Magnuson also sentenced Lane.

The length of the sentences for Kueng and Thao are lower than the recommended federal sentencing guidelines, which called for 4 1/4 years to 5 1/4 years.

"The facts of this case do not amount to second-degree murder under federal law," Magnuson wrote in a ruling last week. "Defendants Kueng and Thao each made a tragic misdiagnosis in their assessment of Mr. Floyd."

Magnuson noted that Kueng and Thao believed Floyd was suffering from a drug overdose and "excited delirium" -- a syndrome in which a subject displays wild agitation and violent behavior that can sometimes lead to death.

Lane was the only police officer involved in Floyd's fatal arrest to express concern for the man's well-being. Police body-camera video played at the three former officers' federal trial captured Lane asking twice if they should roll Floyd onto his side from a prone position to help ease his breathing.

Chauvin, 46, was also convicted in state court in April 2021 on charges of second-degree unintentional murder, third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. He was sentenced in June 2021 by Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill to 22 1/2 years in state prison.

Chauvin will serve his sentence in federal prison concurrently with his state sentence.

Lane also pleaded guilty to state charges of aiding and abetting second-degree manslaughter. In exchange for the plea, prosecutors agreed to dismiss the top charge against him of aiding and abetting second-degree unintentional murder. Lane is awaiting his sentence in state court.

Kueng and Thao are scheduled to be put on trial in state court on Oct. 24 on charges of aiding and abetting in murder and aiding and abetting in manslaughter. They have both pleaded not guilty.

Following Wednesday's sentencing hearings, Ross expressed disappointment in the punishment handed down, especially for Thao.

"The sentence, particularly for Tou Thao, didn't really seem to match the crime to me," Ross told reporters outside the courthouse. "I'm saddened, but I suppose we have to take all these little small triumphs and know that we're going to move forward even though there just little crumbs that they kind of keep giving us, but maybe one day we'll get a loaf of bread."

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HEADLINE	07/27 Mass shooting suspect indicted: 117 counts
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/highland-park-mass-shooting-suspect-indicted-117-counts/story?id=87385767
GIST	<p>The young man accused of carrying out a mass shooting at a suburban Chicago Fourth of July parade, killing seven people and injuring dozens of others, has been indicted on 117 counts, prosecutors in Lake County, Illinois, said Wednesday.</p> <p>Robert "Bobby" Crimo III is charged with 21 counts of first-degree murder (three counts for each victim) as well as 48 counts of attempted murder and 48 counts of aggravated battery with a firearm (for each person hit by a bullet, bullet fragment, or shrapnel), prosecutors said.</p> <p>"Our investigation continues, and our victim specialists are working around the clock to support all those affected by this crime," Lake County State's Attorney Eric Rinehart said in a statement.</p> <p>Crimo, 21, allegedly took his legally purchased high-powered rifle and opened fire from a roof, shooting people who were enjoying the Highland Park parade.</p> <p>Crimo has not entered a plea. His arraignment is set for Aug. 3.</p> <p>Robert 'Bobby' Crimo III, a suspect in the shooting at the 4th of July parade shooting in Highland Park, Ill., a suburb of Chicago, is pictured in an undated photo released by law enforcement, July 4, 2022. City of Highland Park</p> <p>Authorities said they believe the mass shooting had been planned for weeks.</p> <p>Crimo told police he wore women's clothing during the shooting and used makeup to hide his facial tattoos and blend in with the crowd during the chaos, prosecutors said. Crimo was apprehended hours later and prosecutors said the 21-year-old confessed to the shooting.</p> <p>After the shooting, the suspect's father, Bobby Crimo Jr., told ABC News he was "shocked," adding, "I had no -- not an inkling, warning -- that this was going to happen."</p> <p>"This isn't Bobby," he said. "I guess that's why it's so hard to wrap yourself around it. It doesn't add up."</p>

	<p>Highland Park Mayor Nancy Rotering last week pleaded with Congress to pass a federal assault weapons ban.</p> <p>"Less than a minute is all it took for a person with an assault weapon to shoot 83 rounds into a crowd, forever changing so many lives," Rotering told the Senate Judiciary Committee. "And the most disturbing part, this is the norm in our country."</p>
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